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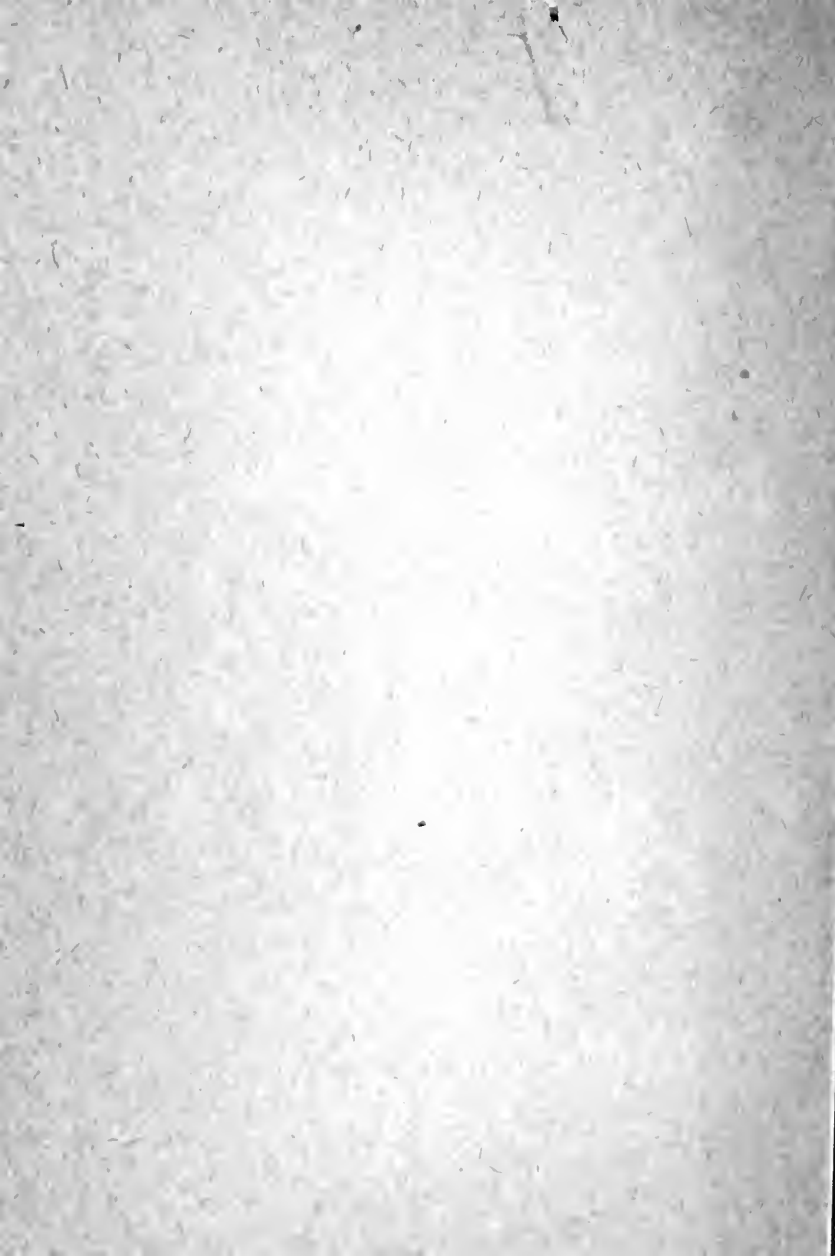
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THE BANKRUPTCY OF  
RELIGION

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# THE BANKRUPTCY OF RELIGION

BY

JOSEPH McCABE,

AUTHOR OF

"THE SOURCES OF THE MORALITY OF THE GOSPELS," ETC.

*( Issued for the Rationalist Press Association, Limited )*

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## PREFACE

THE war has succeeded in enkindling an interest in religion which recalls the Victorian struggle of "science and theology." It is not questioned by the clergy that there has been for some decades an increasing deafness to their appeals; nor will it be questioned by most of the opponents of the clergy that this decay of church-going was very largely due to a weariness of appeal and counter-appeal. We have outlived the days when a Bradlaugh or a Brewin Grant could attract an immense and enthusiastic crowd of artisans to hear a spirited argument about the immortality of their souls.

This is not so much due to levity as to the appalling growth of the controversy. Under the pressure of a searching and many-sided criticism religious discussion has assumed almost the proportions of an encyclopædia. Busy men and women have not time to read it all; and they are warned not to form a dogmatic opinion until they have "read both sides." They have retorted by declining to read either side. Life is just large enough, they say, for work and a little play and a little thinking about our material interests. Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die.

The war has reminded us that other interests may be more important than the conditions of employment or the happy choice of a recreation. We discover that the cultivation of sound moral principles is a fundamental condition of happiness, and we turn again to examine the Churches which claimed to be the proper agents of that cultivation. Were we wrong to desert them? Or does this European calamity give us a further and final proof that we may dispense with them? There is a revived interest in religion, and the clergy call loudly to each other to rise and meet the situation.

It is clear that the more thoughtful or more candid of the clergy regard this new interest as hostile rather than friendly. They are nervously apologetic. They make feverish pleas for their Churches, for Christianity, or for Providence. One gathers that they find round them a large body of hostile critics or disturbed believers; that Christianity is once more on trial in the European mind. And their eager words do not show much confidence in the verdict. They protest too much.

In an earlier work (*The War and the Churches*), which circulates in Russia as well as in this country, I examined the grounds of this recent increase of hostility to religion in connection with the war. Here I raise a larger issue, for the difficulty in the mind of thoughtful people is by no means confined to a sudden and superficial suspicion that life does not accord with the religious message. A comparison between the State and the Church will aptly explain the title and the theme of the book.

The British Empire is notoriously slow to act, but it met its grave crisis with confidence, and will survive it without vital injury, because it had vast accumulated resources. We had had but one war in sixty years; we had enjoyed twenty years of remarkable prosperity; we had a prestige abroad which rested on the solid basis of an annual national income of two thousand million pounds, foreign investments amounting to two thousand million pounds, and an unshakable command of the seas. This mighty and unimpaired strength was slowly asserted, and "decadent England" proved itself still one of the greatest Powers of the world.

Now our Churches were in a precisely opposite condition when they met the crisis. They were enfeebled, impoverished, lowered in prestige by decades of unceasing and unsuccessful warfare. Millions had fallen away from them. Few great laymen would plainly identify themselves with them. Their ministries were weakened by the increasing reluctance of able and courageous men to make the lip-profession of a creed they did not literally believe. Their political and social influence was in decay. Their old dogmatic standards were in tatters, and many of the clergy themselves were disposed to haul them down. Most of their scholars frowned upon the doctrines which were still imposed upon children and the unlearned. They dared not formulate a plain and consistent social gospel. They were divided, distracted, and despondent; and it was after fifty years of this

enervating warfare that the most searching trial of all fell upon them.

That is the true perspective in which we must examine the present position of religion. To say that religion is bankrupt because a great war has occurred in the sphere of its influence would be absurd. But this is only the last blow of a long and heavy series; it is the culmination of a most destructive experience; it is, above all, a test, and a deadly test, of the new defences which the clergy had hastily constructed in the positions upon which they had been compelled to retire. Many said that the controversies of the past half-century had shown them to be intellectually bankrupt. At least, they answered, we are morally and socially solvent, and you cannot dispense with us. The war has shattered their moral prestige and completed their defeat.

That is what I here propose to show. In order to realise the full force of the blow under which the Churches reel to-day one must appreciate the long preparation for it. It is this lengthy preparation, this steady lowering through many decades of the prestige and power of the clergy, that I set out to describe. First I will put in plain and concise form the moral of the war itself, and glance at the recent apologies of clerical and other writers. Then, in four convenient sections, I will summarily describe the great struggles of the nineteenth, and early part of the twentieth, century. Having this material before him, any thoughtful person can appreciate correctly the position of religion in our



life; and in the last chapters I will candidly meet the anxiety of those who imagine that the Christian creed, however slender its influence and poor its representation, cannot be replaced. There is a more solid and more thrilling creed that only awaits its chance.

J. M.



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## INTRODUCTION

### THE WAR AND RELIGION

ONE of the most common laments of the clergy is that the difficulties which withdraw men from religion are superficial. If one submits that this ought to make their apologetic work easier than it seems to be, they make a remarkable reply. They say that a large proportion of their fellows are only too eager to avail themselves of any criticism in order to cast off "the restraints of religion," and that there are powerful and restless organisations forcing these superficial criticisms upon public notice. One imagines a handful of devoted clergy struggling heroically against these untoward circumstances. One hears of writers who, from some secret and not very intelligible hatred of religion, devote their lives to its destruction; of millionaires furtively subsidising the work; of wealthy bodies conducting its organisation.

It is romantic nonsense of this kind that puts the clergy out of touch with modern life, and converts the earlier regard of them into something very like disdain. The notion that any large number of normally-built men *wish* to delude themselves out of a belief in immortality for the sake of a few years of disordered pleasure is merely fanciful. Indeed, one does not, in point of fact, see that it is necessary

to quit the various folds of the Churches in order to obtain that morbid freedom. But the idea that the clergy are thwarted by powerful rival organisations is frankly ridiculous. The Churches of Great Britain, for instance, have in their service a body of 45,000 trained and salaried ministers, a mass of wealth that has accumulated for centuries, the use of the nation's educational machinery for the purpose of enforcing their doctrines upon the young, the advantage of employing our military and penal systems and other institutions, the favour of almost the entire press, and the invariable complaisance of the Government. And against these wealthy and formidable organisations there are arrayed only two small anti-theological associations, with a joint membership of little over 5,000, a slender and precarious income, less than a score of paid officials and servants, and not the thinnest shade of favour from press or national administration !

Clearly the roots of this "spread of infidelity" which the clergy deplore run deep into the modern mind. I have already stated that most of it is not due so much to a reasoned rejection of Christian doctrines as to a disposition to ignore them. It has been statistically established that in the three chief cities of Europe—London, Paris, and Berlin—more than ten out of thirteen million people do not attend church; and inquiries in lesser cities suggest that the situation does not differ much in any large town. Since neither the intelligence nor the morality of townsmen can be rated lower than those of the rural population, this fact has considerable significance; yet one would not say that these

millions have gravely inquired into the credentials of Christianity and rejected them. In a large proportion of cases there has been an emphatic, if superficial, rejection of the doctrines learned in youth. Perhaps in a still larger proportion the abandonment of the Churches is based upon a vague, but quite logical, consciousness that the more learned men of our time are at least hopelessly divided as to the truth of religion; that the clergy are not conspicuously competent to judge the high matters on which they dogmatise; and that the whole subject is beset by a formidable controversy which suffices of itself to make religion a disputable and negligible thing.

This seems to be the normal condition of the modern European mind wherever, as in large cities or higher educational centres, the currents of contemporary thought meet. But in a period of grave and deep disturbance, like that through which we have passed, the surface of the mind is penetrated. Men think. The grim realities of life dwarf the petty interests and pleasures which usually engross us. The jarring and snapping of the larger machinery, which we may forget as long as it moves smoothly, causes sober reflection. The hideous red splashes on our path, the vacant chairs in home or theatre, the galling sacrifices, the broad spectacle of pain and ruin—these things remind us that a man or woman has a responsibility beyond trade or home. We would treasure the sons who remain, that in their hour of manly strength and fine ambition they be not in turn summoned to challenge the red reaper. We would guard our own and our

nation's goods from a recurrence of this orgy of waste.

No man can escape some thought of these things, and it at once brings him face to face with the question of religion. Thousands of years of religious tradition have impressed upon our race that in these catastrophes we must think primarily of the gods. I do not mean that such ideas are literally inherited. That is probably not the case. But they have become a part of our atmosphere, our elementary mental diet. And the Churches force the issue upon us. For years the men and women of Serbia and Belgium had heard their church-bells ring, and had understood that, in responding to the appeal to worship, they put their lives, their daughters, their goods under the care of an all-powerful and all-loving God. Can they do other than think deeply about religion when they brood over the charred skeletons of their homes and the pale remnants of their families?

With all its horrors war does beget unselfishness. We do not need to be Serbs or Belgians or Poles to be deeply moved by these reflections. Even if we had never worshipped God, these millions of poor folk had. It is especially they who have suffered; the patient, hard-working women of rural Belgium, the simple peasants of the Balkans, of Poland, and of western Russia, the less educated millions of a dozen countries. One imagines their grave grey or blue eyes lifted to heaven as they ask: "What had we done?" And we of the cities echo: "What had they done? You tell us—archbishops have told us—that the war was a punishment of unbelief.



Does your God wrack millions of innocent folk for the sins of others? Is he no more able to discriminate between just and unjust than the blind tremor of the earth or the sightless hail? Is he, like yourselves, so poor a psychologist, or so wilful a controversialist, as not to know that what you call infidelity is an honest refusal to profess what one does not believe? Does he prefer *your* willingness to repeat what, in large part, you regard as untrue? Nay, admitting that there were sins and sinners, admitting that all were in some degree sinners, is not this vindictive idea rather out of date? Are not even men now eager to disclaim the idea of *punishing* criminals or children who do wrong? Does God linger in medieval, or ancient Hebrew, moods while men grow more refined and wiser? Or is your whole conception a dream of an unenlightened age which we would do better to abandon?"

These questions are superficial, and they are more true and vital than half the profound discussions of philosophers. They are the plain, natural questions which everybody asks. They are the supreme tests of the last resources of theology, and we shall see that those resources fail to satisfy.

Other aspects of the religious question press themselves upon us at such a time. For half a century the better educated of the clergy have been shifting the stress of their mission from dogma to ethic. Dogma was tottering. Ethic was being increasingly recognised as a fundamental need of life. So the clergy said that they were the indis-

pensable guardians and promoters of high conduct. They had, they said, laid the moral foundations of European civilisation, and they alone could protect those foundations from the corrosive action of the modern atmosphere.

The war reminds us forcibly that these foundations were badly laid. After fifteen centuries of clerical power we discover that the foundation of our international life is force : raw, primitive force. Any nation that chooses to covet its neighbour's goods can arm to the teeth and take them, as individuals have not been allowed to do since we emerged from barbarism. Yet it was infinitely more important to provide a moral base of international life, because the cost of transgression is infinitely greater. What did the clergy do to prevent the conflict ? In which country did they denounce the preparations for the conflict, or the incentives of the conflict ? What have they done since it began to confine the conflict within civilised limits ? Have they had, or used, a particle of moral influence throughout the whole bloody business ? And, if not, is it not time we found other guardians and promoters of high conduct ?

Then there is another prominent aspect. Large numbers of religious people admit to-day that the clergy are a pretentious moral sham, a real hindrance to idealist development. Christianity is not the Churches, and is not in the Churches, they say. It is a simple doctrine of justice and human brotherhood that appeals straight from the lips of Christ to the heart of man. Get rid of the Churches and give it a trial.

But, considering that, with all their faults, the Churches have for some centuries most certainly taught men the moral counsels of Christ, this claim raises further questions. Undoubtedly the Churches have for a very long period impressed upon Europe the Golden Rule and the Sermon on the Mount. Is there something wrong, something ineffective, about these as moral inspirations? Is Christianity, conceived simply as the teaching of Christ, unsuitable to control modern life? Is there any hope that we may find an entirely different and more efficacious appeal? Again these "superficial" questions throng the mind. Every man or woman who is not content to see life continue on the dangerous slope, punctuated by catastrophes, on which we find it, is brought back to the question of the position of religion amongst us. Do we suffer because we have for some decades been discarding its influence? Or do these calamities darken our lives periodically because we trusted its supposed influence too much?

The new interest in religion which was enkindled by the war refers chiefly to these three sets of questions. Men put on trial in their minds, first the Churches or the clergy, secondly the teaching of Christ, thirdly the doctrine of Providence. I will, briefly and concisely, consider each separately. We shall then see whether these superficial questions do or do not prove to be as deep as truth, and whether the many learned divines and few learned philosophers who have tried to answer them have succeeded. It is useful to remember that truth is very often superficial. Philosophers, who are our

most profound thinkers, not only have not a monopoly of truth, but they are more distracted and divided in their speculations than any other body of learned men. However, let us see if the remarks of these many divines and few thinkers do really correct our superficial estimate of the value of religion.

### § 1. THE FAILURE OF THE CHURCHES

We will not be so foolish as to say that we will have nothing further to do with the Churches because they did not prevent the war. They probably could not have prevented it. Our objection to them, at this stage, is precisely that they are not the moral forces they pretend to be. Within limits they have great influence with rulers and statesmen. All rulers and most statesmen like docile subjects—"good subjects," as they say—and it is understood that religion inspires, or tends to preserve, docility. So the clergy receive great privileges. Their doctrines must be taught in the school, while any other idealist who asked such a privilege would be received as a lunatic. As chaplains they are permitted to force their creeds and forms of worship on all soldiers and sailors, criminals and paupers, and even, in some measure, on civic officials, constables, nurses, and other bodies. They form a special section of the British legislature, and they have the ear of every Home Secretary.

But they must not give trouble when a nation is minded to go to war. They never have given

trouble. In every war one or more nations commit the foulest crime against humanity that can be conceived. The existence of a few disorderly houses in a city is, in comparison with the horrible issue of war, a mere trifle. But while the bishops overflow with zeal to suppress the former, one must go far back in history to find a respectable minority of the clergy denouncing a nation on the brink of an aggressive war. The causes of war do not "spring up," as those are apt to say who are too timid or too indolent to trace them. They are definite and frequently prolonged tendencies or actions, yet the clergy, even in the most guilty cases, have always closed their eyes to them.

They would not, in our time, prevent a war if they denounced these tendencies in advance. They are, on every grave issue, a futile force. When their interests are concerned, even politics become "religion"; when their interests would be endangered by opposition, moral issues become "politics." When Austria-Hungary spread covetously over the Balkans, under the angry eyes of Russia, neither Protestant nor Catholic clergy protested. When German education was, in 1890, "prostituted" (to quote a German educationist) to nationalist purposes, or was used to prepare the nation for aggressive war, the clergy were discreetly silent. When, from 1900 to 1914, the country was, with imperial sanction, drenched with provocative literature, the clergy mildly continued to repeat the beautiful Sermon on the Mount. In the fateful month before the crisis they were very quiet.

They might not have prevented war. I very

much doubt if they have sufficient influence for that in either Catholic Austria or Protestant Germany. But they are none the less open to our scorn that they made no attempt. They played their historic part; they stood aside until the time came to bless the banners, and appoint chaplains, and prove their patriotism. This is not rhetoric. It is sheer fact, contemporary and historical. When was there a war in which one party was not definitely aggressive and unjustified? And when do you read that even a large body of the clergy protested?

English ministers and French priests retort eagerly that this refers only to the German and Austrian clergy. Does it? When, in the whole history of France and England, did *they* do otherwise? Never. Had we coveted some weak nation's land, and decorated our aggression with plausible pretexts, they would have acted as the German and Austrian clergy did. It would be "politics" to interfere.

Indeed, as far as the Catholics are concerned, we may press the matter home. Catholicism is international, and has an international head. What did the Pope do? He has cut the sorriest figure in Europe for moral futility. How scrupulously he refrained from deciding which nations were guilty of causing the war! How severely he restrained himself when stories of brutal outrage were poured upon him, even when churches were desecrated and priests shot! This is "politics," he said. I am "neutral." Alfred Loisy (*Guerre et Religion*), once the greatest scholar of the Roman Catholic

Church in Europe, has lashed that pitiful "neutrality" of his old chief until it hangs in tatters. And even M. Loisy does not seem to have perceived the whole truth. If Austria and Germany had won the war, millions of Slavs, who now have an independent Church, would have been opened to official Roman proselytism; whereas the defeat of Austria and Hungary might mean the transfer of many millions of Catholics (Poles, Alsace-Lorrainers, Southern Slavs) from the rule of Powers which are intensely favourable towards the Vatican to the control of schismatic Russia and godless France. So Benedict XV was neutral—as long as the Central Powers promised victory; then he became an angel of premature peace. In the interest of his Church he condoned all the wrongs and brutalities done, and, by his silence if not by secret communication, encouraged the "patriotism" of the Austrian and German clergy. And without this Church of Rome, Catholics say, there is no hope for civilisation.

The same neutrality was observed by the Protestant clergy of non-militant countries. They have not, like the Pope, jurisdiction over their colleagues in England and Germany; they have no official relations with them. But at a time when the moral judgment of the world ought to have been exercised in selecting the guilty for censure and sternly investigating the charges of deviation from the laws of civilised warfare, they were dumb. In the greatest moral crisis of European affairs they remained silent. When their independent judgment, gravely and emphatically expressed, would undoubtedly have had some influence in restrain-

ing outrages, they refused to take the trouble to frame and formulate it. We know why.

It is hardly worth while noticing the plea, urged by both Catholic and Protestant writers and preachers, that whatever crime has been committed was committed by Germany, and that the crime of Germany is due to the prevalence of Rationalism in that country. Of all the vapid nonsense which the war provoked this was the worst. The Catholic writers of *The New Witness* laid the guilt upon Professor Haeckel and the Monists. They were, apparently, unaware that Haeckel's criticism of religion is associated with the highest-minded humanitarian ethic. He speaks of Christ as "that noble prophet and enthusiast, so full of the love of humanity"; he "firmly adheres" to the Golden Rule and "the best part of Christian morality" (*Riddle of the Universe*, pp. 110 and 120). He is one of the few German professors who have for decades, in spite of the Emperor, drastically condemned the duelling and beer-swilling which sustain the military ardour of German middle-class youth. The influence of the Monists, as far as it goes, is emphatically on the side of humanity. But it does not go far. For a Catholic writer, who knows that there are in Germany about 20,000,000 Catholics and more than 20,000 Catholic priests, to ascribe the conduct of the nation to a few thousand unorganised Rationalists, with no salaried servants, is the depth of fatuity.

Hardly less ridiculous is the claim of Professor T. F. A. Smith (*The Soul of Germany*) and other Protestants, that the "degeneration" is due to



“atheistic Socialism.” There are in Germany about 1,600,000 Socialists (including women), while the Catholic Church claims 22,000,000 members and the Protestant Churches 38,000,000 ! Mr. Smith believes that the tail wags the dog. Moreover, the schools of Germany give more religious instruction than any in Europe, as Mr. Smith admits. In fine, not only has crime (of which Mr. Smith gives false statistics) actually decreased in Germany (in proportion to the growth of population) during the last twenty years, when “atheistic Socialism” grew, but the only journals to condemn the general extravagances and passions were Socialist journals, and the only men to stand firmly against the war and condemn its conduct were free-thinking Socialists. And in the face of all these facts our religious writers would transfer the guilt for the crimes of Germany from its 60,000 organised and professional clergy and their 60,000,000 followers to a scattered handful of Rationalists and less than two million notoriously humanitarian Socialists !

These are desperate efforts to cover the guilt and cowardice of the Churches themselves. They saw the aggressive war-fever rising for fifteen years and looked aside. They would be “patriotic” and “loyal to the Emperor.” In plain English, they were afraid to thwart the passions of the crowd. Let not our clergy rebuke them. We know *their* record. They have never, in such circumstances, sustained their claim to be moral leaders.

We may, in fact, go a step further and embrace

all the Churches and clergy of Europe in a grave and direct indictment. I make no flippant points about Christians shedding human blood and being divided into friends and enemies. Christ's teaching is a confused medley of "counsels of perfection" and absolute moral commands. To give one's goods to the poor and offer the other cheek to the smiter are counsels of perfection. "If thou wilt be perfect," the Gospels say, do these things. But a man may very well be a Christian yet consider himself entitled to defend his country's prosperity, or the soil of a friendly nation, at the point of the bayonet against a brutal aggressor. My point is deeper and more considered. *The fact that in the twentieth century one needs to protect one's goods or land by this repulsive means is a damning indictment of the Christian Churches and clergy.*

In every war there is an aggressor, and in nearly every aggressor there is criminal passion—revenge, covetousness, etc. This passion is enormously more reprehensible than is the indulgence of a perverse impulse in the individual, because the devastation it causes is infinitely greater. It is more reprehensible also because, while the individual may be diseased or unbalanced, the balance of individuals in a nation allows for this, and the passion is deliberately followed. Hence the crime of aggressive war is immeasurably worse than personal crime or vice. The sternest and most pressing duty of the moralist is to judge and brand the guilty aggressor and, if this do not suffice (as it would not), to make war impossible by cutting down

military forces to the proportion of an international police, placing this police under international control, and setting up, with its aid (or, if possible, the aid of diplomatic and commercial penalties), compulsory arbitration for the settlement of quarrels.

To these stern and paramount duties of the moralist the clergy, of all Churches, have been completely faithless. If they had had a moderate perception of their moral duty, and a moderate courage to discharge it, we should have no possibility of war in Europe to-day. During more than a thousand years the clergy, first of the Catholic and then of the rival Churches, quite dominated Europe. During the earlier part of that period disarmament was impossible, on account of the movements of the barbarians and the Turkish and other invasions. There might, indeed, have even then been a pacification of the Christian nations in regard to each other, and Popes sought to enhance their power and prestige by constituting themselves the supreme arbiters. But when nations refused thus to enlarge the dangerous power of the Popes, the clergy made no effort to recommend independent tribunals. The local prelates continued to bless the banners of any unscrupulous monarch who had an itch for "glory" or conquest. The Popes turned ruler against ruler, for their own ends, and they and the Jesuits were mainly responsible for the Thirty Years War, the most terrible and infamous that devastated Europe until our day.

Even when Europe lay exhausted after that

war, neither Protestant nor Catholic clergy conducted a gospel of peace. They were content to repeat the Golden Rule, knowing perfectly, from centuries of experience, the utter futility of that repetition, and finding moral pretexts for every imperial adventurer. One may object that the clergy are not the most intelligent body amongst us, and possibly they did not perceive the way in which, in this grave respect, to give practical effect to the Golden Rule. But what did they do when laymen pointed the way? How many of the clergy of the seventeenth century rallied round Grotius? What assistance did Robert Owen get from the Churches of England when he formulated in explicit terms the ideal of arbitration? None whatever. The clergy of England still had such power that men were forced to pay tithes and, in some places, could be compelled to attend church. But not an atom of their mighty power was used to further this greatest of moral and social reforms.

The practical ideal of peace had to grow up under the shelter of heresy. But it grew, and at length the Churches perceived that there was danger of a great reform coming near realisation without their assistance. Courts of arbitration were established; a detailed scheme was elaborated by French free-thinking lawyers and statesmen; the movement spread. From that point the clergy have been increasingly in favour of arbitration. It is too late. They are not now saving humanity. They are saving the Churches. Most assuredly many of the clergy are now sincere humanitarians; but they

have learned practical ideas of reform from outsiders, and the main impulse to the clerical conversion has been the fear, openly expressed in congresses, that the world was in danger of proceeding on its way without them.

I will show in detail, in the last section, that this has been the normal course of their development. They were completely indifferent as long as their droning of the words of Christ engendered no social idealism. They were very busy meeting critics of *Genesis*, urging the prosecution of blasphemers, defending their privileged position in the schools; but they had no clear moral prescription for our great social diseases, the worst and most costly of which is war. When others began to formulate schemes, and attract crowds to lecture-halls instead of Churches, they were moved. Many of them became social idealists. Yet to-day, under pressure of an enormous secession from their Churches, so rigid and deep-rooted is their tradition of moral inertia that only a slender minority of them work in the practical peace-movement, and not a single Church has lent it its corporate support.

That is what men and women say to the Churches. They have been futile on the largest moral issues. They have absolutely wasted the period when they held tremendous power to influence these things. It is little use for them to remind us that they all along urged men to love each other. They had seen for centuries how futile such vague commands were. A detailed ideal, with solid reasons for accepting it, was needed, and to this they contributed nothing. They have, in fact, in every war, on

every side, assured men that they were not transgressing the Christian rule; as the German and Austrian clergy and religious journals fervently assure their followers to-day. And this, as I will show, is but the culmination of a long exposure of their moral futility. We must do the work ourselves, first as groups of individuals, then as States. By all means let us have the assistance of the clergy and the Church-organisations, though it is not yet in sight. But to tell us that we do no high work without the Churches, that if they perish we deteriorate, is, in face of such a record, entirely ridiculous.

## § 2. THE FAILURE OF CHRISTIANITY

This futility of the organised Churches is now so widely recognised, even outside sceptical circles, that a new issue is raised. Let us by all means, it is said, ignore the Churches and the clergy, but let us be careful not to throw away the pearl with the oyster. These Churches, we are told, are a false and perverse setting for the simple teaching of Christ. They are not Christianity. Christ scorned temples and priesthoods. The real Christians were the early followers who met, without priests, to break bread and carry out the precept of brotherhood. Let the Churches go. But the teaching of Christ is needed to save the world.

Is it? Precisely one of the questions that thoughtful people are putting to themselves is: Has not this Christian ethic somehow proved futile in Europe? It has raised many saints, it has

inspired many philanthropists. We do not need to be reminded of these triumphs. But we must keep some sense of proportion. For every saint there were a million sinners; a million whom the words of Christ failed to influence. For every philanthropy inspired by Christ's words there were a hundred philanthropies neglected. Indeed, it was always the greater deeds, the things we to-day consider most important, which were neglected. Alms-giving was very largely inspired, but not a zeal to get at the roots of poverty. Foundations of schools were frequently inspired, but never (until heretics began the agitation) a determination to have a national and effective system of education. Vincents de Paul and Elizabeth Frys were moved to mitigate the lot of prisoners, but the words of Christ did not inspire the large modern ideal of the scientific treatment of crime or disease. Purity was frequently cultivated, but Christians were not led to perceive that our atrocious marriage-laws and general ignorance were directly provocative of licence. Wounded soldiers found many friends, but no one gathered from the words of Christ that the wounds might have been avoided.

I have in the preceding pages spoken chiefly of the clergy, as they are trained and paid to apply Christianity to life. But the laity in the Churches, who were quite familiar with the words of Christ, have scarcely a better record. In the early reform-days (the latter part of the eighteenth and early part of the nineteenth centuries) a few individuals distinguished themselves by social idealism. The vast majority of the religious laity held aloof from

it; the resources of no Church were, in any measure, devoted to it. In those days Christian folk would have been greatly astonished if they had been asked to do these things. Social reforms were "politics"; in fact, "radicalism." The business of a Christian, as such, was to attend to divine worship, correctness of belief, and propriety of individual conduct. I will show in the last section how terribly remiss Christians were a century ago, and had been for hundreds of years, in the larger duties of life. In regard to war, which here concerns me, the fact is well enough known. A hundred years ago only Robert Owen and a handful of free-thinking radicals, supported by a few Quakers (who were hardly recognised as Christians), held the great ideal before England.

Yet these Christians of a century ago—in England, France, Germany, and everywhere—were perfectly familiar with the teaching of Christ. The Churches taught them much besides the words of Christ, and laid undue stress on correctness of belief or ritual, but they certainly did convey the teaching of the New Testament to people. They had done so for ages. The Protestant may object that in Catholic lands "the preaching of the word" was neglected. But since the worst periods of the Middle Ages there has been no generation of Christians that has not been entirely familiar with the Golden Rule and the other ethical maxims of the Gospels.

The historical fact is, then, that the teaching of Christ has failed in Europe. I do not mean failed to produce any results. Religious literature is so



slipshod and fallacious that this defect is concealed by a very naive practice. When you say that the Christian ethic failed, the Christian writer begins a long list of the noble men and women it inspired, the schools and hospitals it created here and there, the efforts of our fathers to do justice and redeem iniquity. No one doubts these things. I was myself nurtured on the lives of the saints for years, and I know them in their entirety. But why talk of the founding of a few schools when ninety-five per cent. of Europe remained illiterate until the nineteenth century? Why speak of hospitals and charitable institutions when the provision was miserably inadequate, and the roots of disease and poverty were never studied? Why single out a few good people when what we are discussing is the service of Christianity to the race generally? It remains true that, in proportion to the immense evils which called for redress and to the resources which pious folk have for ages put at the service of Christianity, the Gospel teaching has been a failure in Europe.

There is a pathetically earnest type of person who frequently replies to me on this point that the teaching of Christ did not fail, but men failed to practise it. Precisely; it failed to induce men to practise it. We want something more effective. We want to impress upon men and women motives of conduct that will influence more than a minority. The great war of our time is the culmination of a long historical proof that the ethic of Christ has failed.

And one does not need great learning or acute

penetration to see why it failed. It failed because it was dogmatic and authoritative; because it was mingled with impracticable and mischievous counsels; because it was shaped by conditions of life which have gone for ever, and is entirely unsuited to the present conditions. A short explanation of these points will suffice.

1. The ethic which is ascribed to Christ in the Gospels—how far they reproduce his words does not concern me here—is dogmatic and authoritative, because it imposes rules of conduct without giving reasons for them. In the very illiterate centuries which preceded modern times this kind of ethical culture *might* have some chance of success. In point of fact it did not succeed, but with that I am not concerned for the moment. It is plainly a quite unsuitable form of inspiration for such an age as ours. In its finest form the Christian message is that a God of infinite tenderness and love requires of us a certain standard of conduct. But the moment the foundations of religion are obscured by doubt, this ethic begins to waver. Was Christ God? Had he a right to impose a standard of life? Is there a God? Has anybody a right to impose a standard of conduct? Are the Gospels a reliable version of Christ's life and words? Was there ever such a person? These questions saturate the modern atmosphere; and the answer must be sought in labyrinths of controversy.

Now it is obviously useless or dangerous to stake moral culture on the affirmative answer to these questions when the answer is very widely disputed. You teach your children to "be good" on the

strength of the truth of the Christian story. What is likely to happen when they go out into the world and hear it challenged on all sides? You have made their standard of conduct a conditional thing; conditional upon a story the truth of which is questioned, in fundamental parts, even by divines. It is useless to say that the ideal of conduct in the Gospels is so "high" or so "noble" or so "beautiful" that it does not matter whether or no Christ was God, or even whether or no there was a Christ. It may not matter to a few refined natures, but it matters vitally to the majority of people. The very divines who not long ago assured us, and in large part still assure us, that man is naturally prone to wickedness, would now have us believe that he will accept an austere code of morals simply because it is "exalted"!

Most people of our time belong to neither one class nor the other. They do not submit to rules of conduct on æsthetic grounds, but they are ready to accept restrictions for which the reason is apparent. If you say that the reason of Christ's inculcation of virtue is apparent—in increased happiness of life—then it would be better to omit all references to his authority, to disputable rewards and punishments beyond the grave, or to the æsthetic qualities of virtue. That is precisely what we propose to do in a saner ethic.

2. But there are very obvious reasons why the Christian ethic cannot be bodily transferred to a new basis, and one of these is the second reason for its historic failure. It is full of impracticabilities; of things that we really do not want to do, and trust

no large number of people will ever want to do. To turn the other cheek to the smiter is to encourage bullies and disturbers of public order. To offer the other pocket to the man who has emptied one is a maxim which no social order could tolerate. To take up our cross and tread narrow paths is a piece of superfluous asceticism which makes comfortable and not bad-natured folk distrust teachers of virtue. To give one's goods to the poor is bad economy from every point of view. To slight one's mother and brethren because one has a high ideal is churlish conduct. To advise abstention from marriage and the getting of children is an injury to the State and a needless cruelty to the individual.

The Gospels are full of these things. I have said that Christ probably meant these things as "counsels of perfection," but there is nothing superior about them. That is an ancient ethical superstition. It is absurd to tell modern men and women that it is inferior, though allowed, to enjoy thoroughly whatever pleasure life affords, provided you hurt none. The Gospels are pervaded by this note from end to end. Yet it is so false that the Protestant Churches, which now outnumber the Catholic, maintain that the monastic ideal, which is a logical embodiment of this Christian teaching, is an entire mistake. These exaggerations have always vitally restricted the influence of Christ's ethic on the mass of people. They are quite characteristic of that ethic, and therefore it must be recognised as a mistake.

3. Many religious writers try to save its credit by, as usual, complaining of "superficial" criti-

cisms. Men of this type call you superficial if you do not recognise that when Christ (*Mark*, ix, 43) spoke of "the fire that never shall be quenched" he meant the fire that the Almighty will mercifully quench in a very short time. They will call you superficial if you do not see that the story of the Fall of Man means that prehistoric men began to sin as soon as they were intelligent enough to do so. Christ's words must, they say, not be taken literally. It is the spirit that quickens. He meant that it was a fine trait of character to suffer violence without anger, to keep a spirit of philosophic detachment amidst wealth, to refuse to allow our affection for family to interfere with our cultivation of virtue.

Christ assuredly did *not* mean this. He meant what he said. He was grieved when a rich young man refused to give his goods to the poor. He was—if we accept the assurance of divines that the fourth Gospel is unreliable—on bad terms with his mother and brothers. He so plainly dissuaded from marriage that the Bishop of London has never felt free to marry. These ingenious interpreters of Christ's meaning are either ignorant of, or they conveniently forget, the historical circumstances of the age in which they are so intensely interested. Numbers of moralists of the time embraced these exaggerations. Epictetus said precisely the same as Christ. Pythagoras had taught such asceticism in Greece five hundred years before; Buddha in India. It was familiar in Egypt and Persia. I have shown (in *The Sources of the Morality of the Gospels*) that every sentiment ascribed to Christ in the

Gospels was well known in the Græco-Roman world of the time.

In the case of Christ there was a special reason for the literal teaching of such things, and this is the feature which most of all makes his ethic unsuitable for modern times and explains its exaggerations. Liberal theologians have explained away much, but they have not yet ventured to suggest that Christ really did not expect a speedy end of the world. It is, as I have elsewhere shown, this expectation that shapes the ethic of the Gospels. It is my belief that Christ came, as Mr. George Moore has suggested in his *Brook Kerith*, from an Essene monastery. In the cloister he learned these ascetic ideas, and, under the belief that the end of the world was near and men would be caught in sin, he left the monastery and went out to the cities to preach. However that may be, the key-note of his teaching is that the judgment of all men approaches and the wise man will at once disentangle himself from the things of earth; will give his goods to the poor, leave wife and family, mortify his flesh in order to keep it chaste, and so on.

Now this expectation, which overshadows the Gospels and was common in the eastern world of the time, explains both the great fervour of the preacher and his exaggerations. It also makes his ethic quite unsuitable for a later age, and partly explains its sterility in social respects. Men who expect a speedy end of the world are not concerned about social maladies. They do not set about the abolition of war or slavery or political injustice. Such reforms take a long time. Long before they

can be accomplished the social order will be at an end. Christ did not trust that his general maxims of charity and brotherhood would gradually put an end to war or slavery or any social wrong. He was not concerned at all about gradual reforms. It stands written in the Gospels that he expected the end of the world within the life-time of that generation. Why, in such circumstances, worry about militarism, economic arrangements, or political forms?

On this account the Christian ethic has remained supremely individualistic and barren of social results. The important thing was for the individual to cleanse his soul. When, in a few centuries, Christians ceased to expect the end of the world, there was still the fear of death, judgment, and eternal damnation for the individual. The ethic retained its character. Men and women were moved by it to practise the most scrupulous chastity and the last degree of humility. These are historical facts. It is also an historical fact that for centuries they were not moved to right social wrongs. So the nations helplessly suffered war, and engaged in war, until our time. The ethic of Christ failed. This war is the last of many monuments of its failure. We want a new ethic, suited to inspire men and women who do not believe that the end of the world is near, but who, on the contrary, believe that the end is millions of years off, and therefore feel that our social arrangements had better be improved as quickly as possible.

## § 3. THE FAILURE OF PROVIDENCE

Logically, when a man has discarded the characteristic Christian doctrines, there remain the fundamental beliefs which are common to all the higher religions. It may very well be doubted if religion will survive long, as an organised body of believers, on that basis. Theistic churches have never prospered. Even Unitarianism gets little advantage from the present widespread defection from the older Churches. As a rule, when men and women learn that the Christianity of the last eighteen centuries was a delusion, they have done with religion. If God was so little interested in men, they do not feel a very acute interest in him.

In point of fact, however, it is more usual for the modern mind to begin its criticism at the foundation. A man inquires whether or no there is a God, and, if he find no convincing evidence, has no need to inquire further. It is in this respect that the war has most frequently struck the sceptical note. "Is there a God?" men and women ask, as they survey the blood-sodden fields, the ruined villages, the white, drawn faces that range over Europe. I have in earlier works shown that this question, prompted as it is by sentiment, is no superficial lament. There is deep logic behind it. Let me here briefly summarise the argument.

The existence of God has been an open question in learned circles for several generations. At first men treated the occasional "atheist" as a



fool, an abnormal person, a negligible quantity. But as early as 1802 Paley found it advisable to write a learned work in proof of the existence of God. The number of those who doubted was growing rapidly. Paley's work set the fashion for future divines. It is now the custom in theological literature to explain, genially, that Paley is out-of-date; that the new kind of proof is not Paleyist. This is fundamentally untrue, as I will show in detail later. The most popular and most common proofs of the existence of God are still appeals to some object in or feature of nature which, it is said, "science cannot explain."

An amusing instance occurs while I write these pages. In the course of his *Mission of Repentance and Hope* the Bishop of London somewhere (as reported in *The Daily Chronicle*, September 12, 1916) boldly confronted the new doubts about the existence of a Providence. For him, he said, nature furnished the evidence; and he selected an illustration which richly illumines the recesses of the episcopal mind. The words imputed to him by the reporter, with proper quotation-marks, are so absurd that one could hardly conceive a rural clergyman perpetrating such a blunder, yet it is obvious that the argument was not invented by the journalist. They run:

"Why are we not blown off this earth as we rush through space at ten miles a second? The answer is because someone has wrapped seventy miles of atmosphere round the earth. The most credulous person who is here is the man who can believe that that happens by accident."

It is hardly necessary to observe that there is nothing whatever in space to "blow us off this earth." Even if there were no atmosphere at all, as there is not on the moon, and if the speed of the earth were a thousand times greater—its composite speed is, in fact, very much greater than the Bishop says—there would be nothing to disturb a single thread of thistle-down on the surface of our globe. Moreover, the girding of the earth by an atmosphere, which the Bishop says must be due to Providence, is one of the most easily explained things in astronomy. Globes form by the condensation of immense stretches of loose matter, and in this condensation the lighter gases are inevitably left at the outside.

Now when we find so experienced a Christian Evidencer as the Bishop of London putting forward this type of argument, and in face of a poignant scepticism, we appreciate the general futility of the arguments of the clergy. They find the finger of God in remote stars, in prettysunsets, inlandscapes, in the pattern of shell-fish or the eye of a gnat. Nature is full of indications. But when you ask them where are the indications in the life of man they have only foolish things like the above to offer you. The men and women of our time are not much interested in the God of nature. A cold intelligence, that fashions atoms and stars and flowers, and leaves men to their own imperfect devices, is not quite the God Christianity led them to expect. Where is the God who counts the hairs of our head, and marks the fall of sparrows, and loves men above all his works?

This is the gravest question raised by the war in connection with religion. The Rev. R. J. Campbell, who has made earnest efforts week by week to stem the rising tide of scepticism, complained that the war really raised no new issue at all. He could not, he said, understand why religious people were suddenly disturbed. Of course it has raised no new issue. What it has done is to enforce, to give a tragic and stupendous form to, questions that have long been in people's minds.

The ordinary man or woman is, as I said, mildly interested in the God of nature. It is God as *Providence* that matters. We should like to see a little of this vast intelligence devoted to helping the stumbling steps, sparing the bleeding feet, of man. We should like to see this supreme benevolence that feeds ravens making some mark in the human order, helping our halting wisdom to lessen the world-old flow of tears and blood, guarding the innocent from pain and privation, snatching the woman and child from the war-drunk brute—or, what would be simpler and better, preventing the birth of the brute, or the germination of his impulses.

Just this has always been the supreme difficulty of the theologian. He cannot show us any clear trace of the action of God in the human order. He leaps occasionally at legends like that of the angels at Mons, or the miracles of Lourdes, which do not survive serious inquiry, but he is, as a rule, pained to find that the human order is *precisely* that in which the finger of God cannot be clearly traced. He murmurs that God works secretly, subtly, in

the dim depths of the mind ; that he has given men " free will " and must respect it ; that perhaps the highest form of kindness is to let a man grow strong by helping himself. Behind all these nervous apologies is the blank perception that the God he sees so clearly in sunsets and roses and birds of paradise cannot be definitely traced anywhere in the life of man. Has anything happened in this generation, anywhere on earth, in which one can plausibly trace the finger of God ? Is there any event in the whole long record of man's career in which we detect it ? Where is the event that we cannot satisfactorily resolve into its natural causes ?

It is this doubt that the war has clinched. It was not as if men did not need assistance. What an agonising record is that of our race ! Hundreds of thousands of years were spent by primitive man in stumbling through the horrors of savagery toward the threshold of civilisation. Then this civilisation was so imperfect, and retained so many barbaric ideas, that pain and misery were still the lot of millions. Even to-day we gaze almost helplessly upon the wars, the diseases, the poverty, the crimes, the narrow minds and stunted natures which darken our life. And God, it seems, was busy gilding the sunset or putting pretty eyes in peacocks' tails. The war has, I say, clinched the argument in the minds of many. We have long suspected that there was no trace of this wonderful Providence in the life of man. Historians find no vestiges of it in the record of the race ; and all the progress of modern times can be traced to distinct human origins. Do not tell us that we cannot

prove that God was *not* working in the minds of the race's benefactors. We cannot prove that there are not legions of angels on the moon, but that does not give any person the slenderest sensible reason for believing that there are. Such talk is frivolous. We have no interest in *dis*-proving anything. What we say is that, as the modern science of history unrolled before us the record of the race, which was once encrusted with miracles, it became a plain natural chronicle of man's follies and crimes and virtues. There was no help from God in it. And the feeling culminates in this spectacle of passion running riot and millions of innocent folk falling under its knife; while from the brazen heaven comes only the mocking reverberation of their prayers.

What do our bishops and priests say to it? Some of their comments can scarcely be read with patience. God, says one great prelate, echoed by a crowd of preachers, is punishing Europe for infidelity. That is to say, God is sending brutality into the homes of pious Belgian and French peasants and rending the limbs of the innocent because the more learned folk of Brussels and the artisans of Namur were not convinced by the writings of the clergy! God is punishing sin, say others. Still the same vindictive Jehovah of the bloodiest pages of the Old Testament! Men have got to such a pitch of refinement that thousands now say they would rather die than shoot a brutal aggressor, but when God's dignity is affronted he may lay about like a maddened peasant with a scythe. The Sermon on the Mount does not apply

to *him*. Half of the clergy seem to think in these horrible terms.

The other half believe, and must believe, that God permitted, but did not cause, the war. The distinction is subtle, especially as they also believe that God "made" the brains of the men who did cause the war. He permitted it in order to show us how infidelity works itself out in ruin, some say. I have previously exposed the hollowness of this foolish suggestion that infidelity inspired the war. I will add only that the sheer folly of the plea is realised when we reflect that at a time when infidelity was unknown in Europe war was more frequent, more brutal, and more blatantly aggressive than it now is. Other religious writers say that God "permitted" the war on account of sin. The motive matters little. Such "permission" is still vindictive punishment of the crudest order. What would you think of the parent who would stand by and see his daughter grossly outraged, while fully able to prevent it? And would you be reconciled if the father proved to you that his daughter had offended his dignity in some way?

But the war is good for us, they say. Suffering is remedial. We were growing "materialistic"; that is to say, anxious to procure as much comfort and pleasure as we could—a dreadful lapse from virtue. We needed the ordeal of pain and sacrifice. So the Bishop of London, Mr. R. J. Campbell, and other popular oracles said; repeating the precise language in which Treitschke had educated Germany. This is almost worse than ever. Does the end justify the means? Had God no more

humane method of education at his infinite disposal? Nay, the very groundwork of the argument is little better than cant. The few heroisms and improvements of character brought about by war are lost in the general moral and physical deterioration. War has ever been the great vampire of the race, the destroyer of nations, the retarder of the march of civilisation. God ought to know it. Every historian does.

Yet something like this is the "deepest" defence religious writers have put forward. The most serious book produced on the religious side during the war is *The Faith and the War*; a series of essays by distinguished liberal Churchmen, edited by Canon Foakes-Jackson. Most of it has no more value than what I have previously examined, but it suggests a certain weight by including a letter from Professor James Ward, one of our leading philosophers. Professor Ward probably does not at all accept the characteristic doctrines of Christianity. He seems, from his published works, to be a theist of an advanced character; I mean that his God is not the God of the Churches and the Bible. But he is one of the few scholars who vaguely associate themselves with the Churches; usually on the ground that Churches are very good things for other people.

Professor Ward's philosophic defence of God is that "the world has thoroughly to evolve itself." I like the "has." The Professor does not justify it. On the theistic view there was no need whatever for the world to evolve. Man might have been created in a fairly civilised condition.

However, Professor Ward appeals to the "school-master" argument, which is familiar in the more popular writings of Mr. Campbell. "Experimentally to know evil is to shun it," he says. Now "the German ideal of militarism is a great experiment." It will be "a move on for the world" if it is "utterly defeated and exposed now." So, he cheerfully concludes, "the lesson, it may fairly be said, will be worth what it costs."

Professor Ward is one of the people who are so very disdainful about "superficial" criticisms of religion; and this argument is as superficial, as pitifully weak and desperate, as any the Bishop of London ever coined.<sup>1</sup> Professor Ward is a teacher, one of our most distinguished professors. Yet he seems to think that you must teach adults as you teach some children; they must burn their fingers to learn that fire burns. It would not be possible to work out beforehand and impress upon people the cost of aggressive militarism. It has to be tried. The civilised nations of Europe must, like wayward children, burn their fingers; or, what is worse, burn other people's fingers. Then the professors and the moralists will gather round and applaud, and say: "You see, fire burns, as we told you. This is a move on for the world." All of which, at the best, might show that men are still children, but it does not in the least inform us why God or Christianity permits them to linger in this dangerous stage at this hour of the world.

<sup>1</sup> The Bishop's latest effort is: "When one great nation was bent on war and had been preparing for it for forty years, even God could not stop it" (*Sunday Times*, October 22, 1916).



But the extreme absurdity of the argument is seen when we glance at history. Professor Ward talks as if history did not exist; as if aggressive militarism had not been tried hundreds of times before. History reeks with stories of the ruin of nations by aggressive imperialism. Not an Empire has fallen but the chief cause of its fall was exhaustion on the field of battle. We have before us a seroll recording eight thousand years of carnage and ruin in the name of aggressive militarism. In each case first it slew or outraged millions, and then was itself slain or humiliated. If the fate of Egypt and Assyria and Babylonia, of Persia and Syria and Turkey, of Greeee and Rome and Carthage, of Venice and Genoa and Naples and Spain and Portugal, had no lesson for men, what will the downfall of Wilhelm II teach them? If the Professor means that the experiment had to be tried on a vaster, bloodier, more destructive scale than ever, before men would be convineed, he may be right, but he is preeisely corroborating our suspicions about religion. Man is left to his own clumsy devices. No loving Providence helps him. Prayer is waste of time. We do better to put our energy into the construction of a more effective scheme of education and a saner arrangement of our human affairs.

To that we come back always. The era of religious influence closes in bankruptey. We must start a new social business. But, as I said, the full strength of the case against religion is not seen unless we realise that this last blow is the final one of a series. We must study its resources ebbing,

the prestige of its clergy falling, through the previous century. We must learn how its intellectual pretensions were shattered before it began to stress its moral and social pretensions. We must understand that those moral and social pretensions were condemned almost before they were uttered. We must regard the war, not as an accidental failure amidst general success, but as the final proof of a general and lamentable failure.

## SECTION I

### THE VERDICT OF SCIENCE

## CHAPTER I

### THE EARLY STRUGGLE

THERE are two ways in which one might write the story of the failure of religion in modern Europe. A fascinating way would be to begin with the great anti-Christian movements in literature which preceded the French Revolution and follow the development of European life, decade by decade, until the Great War. This would, however, require an immensely larger volume than the present work ought to be. If the story were written on a large scale, the reader would be bewildered by the complexity of currents and the crowd of men and events, although we confined ourselves to the study of religion. The alternative, which I take, is to summarise under a few heads the lines of development, of life or culture, which have gradually exposed the futility of religion. It is most convenient to class these agencies under the heads of science, history, and philosophy, and to group the moral, social, political, and other developments under the title of humanity.

But the reader must carefully remember that each section follows only one group of threads in a

very complex web. I start at a comparatively late date in the development of science. At this date not only had the authority of the Churches been severely shaken many times already by scientific discoveries, but the other agencies, which are described afterwards, had done even more deadly work than science. History, for instance, had riddled the Bible and the pretensions of the clergy long before men began to dispute about *Genesis* and evolution. The French Revolution had, however crudely and unhappily in some features, made a permanent difference in the position of the clergy in Europe. These influences continued to work while science developed its great conflict with theologians. Much will be better understood if this is borne in mind.

It is also expedient to explain that, in taking science first, I do not support the somewhat loose view that the modern revolt against religion is overwhelmingly due to science. The clergy find it convenient to imagine this, as they may then urge that men whose whole life is spent in the study of material things are not likely to be competent authorities on "spiritual" things; unless, of course, they take the side of the angels, in which case Faraday and Kelvin and Lodge become quite respectable witnesses to spiritual truth, and even the mediocre student of science finds himself distinguished. This is mere pulpit oratory. History, for instance, has done more damage to religion than science. But even such highly "spiritual" branches of culture as poetry have had a great share. Goethe and Schiller, Byron and Shelley,

were as hostile to Christianity as Swinburne, Watson, D'Annunzio, and probably the majority of recent poets of distinction.

Science has attracted popular attention to its conflicts with the clergy chiefly for two reasons. In the first place, unlike history, it brought an immense amount of absolutely fresh knowledge, and very interesting knowledge, into modern life. The interest it awoke in every class of people in the middle and later decades of the nineteenth century was stupendous. As much of this knowledge was obviously in conflict with the dogmatic teaching of the clergy of the time, the public, which took comparatively little notice of the work of historians, was profoundly moved. The second reason is that science quickly proved its power, its grip of reality. The successive harnessing in the service of man of steam and electricity, the myriads of inventions which brightened life and alleviated pain, the value of the new method in economics and social matters—all these things testified to the solidity of the bases of science.

The struggle of science and religion began very early. By "the struggle of science and religion" I mean, plainly, the conflict between things authoritatively taught by scientific men and the things authoritatively taught by the clergy and generally believed by the laity of the time. If religious folk care to discard one doctrine after another, and then, when they have declared of no essential importance the dogmas for which their predecessors vehemently fought, naively remark that there is no conflict, it is their concern. The fact is that there has been

a vast amount of very bitter conflict of theologians, as a body, against accepted results of scientific investigation; and I will show presently that there is a permanent conflict between the aim of science and the ambition of theology.

This conflict is as old as civilisation. The records of the older Empires are in this respect too dim for scrutiny, but in Greece "natural philosophers" came into frequent and very dangerous encounter with the representatives of religion. When Europe began, after the first unhappy millennium of Christian influence was over, to recover its culture, the conflict was renewed. There is no need here to recall the tragic incidents of that early clash of culture and religious authority. It is enough to say that more than once before the eighteenth century, as scholars knew, the theologians had lost prestige by resisting scientific truth. This was not merely in the realm of astronomy. There had been many other exposures of the errors of the clergy. Witchcraft, for instance, was now recognised to be a clerical hallucination that had wrought an appalling amount of evil. Lunacy was beginning to be recognised as a disease, whereas the clergy had for ages recommended the most gross treatment in order to expel demons from the insane. Disease generally was known to have very much less to do with devils than the clergy had persistently taught, and medicine was proving more efficacious than prayers and relics, to the grave detriment of clerical prestige and clerical treasures. Meteorology was beginning to show that storm and lightning were not exactly "the act of God."

There was, in fact, a very comprehensive conflict of the scientific mood and the theological position long before the nineteenth century began. The great attack on the clergy was, as I said, from the side of history and biblical study, but the critics made heavy use of these other matters. As the night of the Middle Age lifted the clergy were found to have shared all through it the ignorance of the time. Life was a struggle of devils and angels, to be settled by properly anointed persons armed with holy water and other charms. The eighteenth-century critics were quick to point out what a hideous and costly mess this attitude had made of life, and what fine progress in the conquest of pain and evil they owed to the new "natural philosophers." The clergy looked upon these early natural philosophers with suspicion and disquiet.

In all these cases in which the clergy had put a wrong interpretation on natural phenomena they had their texts of Scripture to justify them. Christ himself had plainly endorsed the belief that evils of body and mind were due to possession by devils. But the germ of the great conflict was in *Genesis*. Every Church sternly held that the Bible was literally and sacredly accurate from cover to cover, and the Bible told the story of the universe plainly enough. God created the heavens and the earth; that is to say, he made them out of nothing. He made them in six days, and, as man was created on the sixth day, which was only about 4,000 years before Christ, the whole scheme of things was about 6,000 years old. I will consider presently whether the Old Testament did really say and mean these

things. For the moment it is enough that the Churches emphatically held that it did.

Astronomy and geology began the struggle. In the seventeenth century Descartes had scandalised the French clergy, who got him banished, by sketching an extraordinary scheme of the development of the heavens and the earth, during long ages, which ignored *Genesis* as if it were the legend of a savage tribe. Swedenborg adopted it from Descartes and spread it in Protestant Scandinavia. Leibnitz, the German philosopher, invented another non-biblical theory. Buffon, the great French naturalist, speculated freely on this gradual and very ancient origin of things, and Kant did the same in Germany. Works of this kind circulated only among the learned, but the popular writers who preceded the French Revolution, and were very hostile to the Bible, introduced many of these ideas to the middle class generally. Many of the French pre-Revolutionary writers (La Mettrie, Condillac, Diderot, etc.) were atheists and materialists.

The spirit of observation which grew during the eighteenth century soon led to a suspicion, which appears repeatedly in books of the time, that the rocks had been formed very slowly and gradually, and that the fossils were the petrified remains of animals and plants. The periods which this view opened to the imagination were a direct challenge to the theological version of the origin of the earth, and, as geology developed, the clergy watched it anxiously. At first "the Deluge" was thought to afford an explanation of these phenomena, and some clergymen associated themselves with the



science. But the vista of time which was gradually opened went far beyond the biblical chronology, and as early as 1696 Whiston proposed a new and more liberal interpretation of *Genesis*. By the end of the eighteenth century the labours of Werner, Hutton, Smith, and other geologists had made it plain that vast periods of time had been occupied by the development of the earth.

Had this revelation come alone the re-interpretation of *Genesis* might have been effected without much loss of prestige. The early geologists, it appears, very generally found proofs of the Deluge in the rocks, and in few cases were hostile to Scripture. But the revelation was not alone. A whole series of scientific phantoms were rising round the field of theology, and there was in most countries a keen body of anti-clerical writers eager to point the moral.

Astronomy had become speculative, and it also talked of a long and gradual development of things. From the days of the earliest Greek thinkers there had been a tendency to regard the globes of the universe as formed by the slow condensation of masses of loosely scattered matter. No one could, even in the eighteenth century, suspect that hundreds of millions of years were involved in such a process, but it was vaguely felt that it meant a very long period of time. Moreover, development was not creation. In the eyes of the earlier clergy the idea of gradual development dissipated the supposed action of the Creator into an unsubstantial name. Yet the speculation haunted the minds of scientific men. Laplace at the end of the eighteenth

century presented in a more severe form, though he did not give prominence to it, the theory that stars were formed from nebulæ. Herschel, with his giant telescope, discovered that nebulæ were real, and not merely theoretical, objects. The nebular theory was launched.

More ominous was the biological progress. After Buffon the idea of the evolution of living things appeared increasingly in European literature. Erasmus Darwin propagated it in England; Lamarek in France; others in Germany. The great majority of biologists were sternly opposed to it, but in an atmosphere which was less and less favourable to the clergy it found many supporters, and some strange applications. Here the clergy would draw a stern line. *Genesis* said plainly that God created each animal and plant "after its kind." There could be no tinkering with the sacred record in this connection.

But since very large numbers of educated men already rejected the Bible and miracles, and were in search of some new view of the origin of things, the idea of evolution spread. Many do not realise to-day how far anti-clericalism had proceeded more than a century ago; to be sternly checked afterwards in the reaction after the fall of Napoleon. French generals freely speculated whether Pius VII would not be the last Pope. It is therefore not surprising that the idea of evolution was early applied to man. In the seventeenth century the theory had been advanced that Adam and Eve were not literally the first men, but a special and later creation. Many found the theory convenient; the

negro slaves were not our brothers, and need not be treated as such. The discovery of men in America, who could not in that age be easily related to Europeans, gave a good deal of trouble. Before the end of the eighteenth century Lord Monboddo openly advocated that men were descended from monkeys; and the lectures of Sir William Lawrence, a famous surgeon of the early part of the nineteenth century, so plainly pointed in that direction that the volumes had to be withdrawn by the author.

These were but mutterings before the storm, and indeed men were at that time so engrossed with political and military developments that the clergy could afford to ignore them. It was near the middle of the nineteenth century that the great conflict opened, or the pioneers of the opposing forces opened fire.

The general history of the time must be recollected. The burst of fury against the clergy during the French Revolution, associated with a fierce insurrection against wealth and aristocracy, had alarmed the prosperous and ruling class throughout Europe. The clergy were not slow to invent a moral. This horrible subversion of the existing order was, they said, directly due to the anti-Christian writings which preceded the Revolution; and they circulated a garbled version of a foolish episode at Paris in order to give the impression that the sanguinary crowds were under the influence of "the goddess of reason." There is no doubt that the Revolution, in its earlier and sober phases, was initiated and conducted by middle-class free-thinkers, who were sincere humanitarians. But by

an excess of conscience these men relinquished the power which they had obtained, and cruder personalities and uneducated mobs ruled the country. The Parisian mob which perpetrated the famous massacres was for the greater part Roman Catholic. In the provinces the people were overwhelmingly Catholic. The writings of the philosophers had never penetrated the mass of the people, who were, fourteen centuries after the establishment of Christianity in Europe, densely and universally ignorant. Their fury was fired by the fact that the priests had conspired so long with royalty and aristocracy to sustain that regime of unjust oppression and spoliation which Carlyle so caustically sketches.

But large and complex contemporary events were not in those days acutely analysed; if they are in any days. The ruling class agreed with the Revolutionaries that religion and privilege held together, and the restoration of the French royalty was the inauguration throughout Europe of a reign of terror against liberals as bloody as the terror of 1792. In France itself the coercion was kept within limits by the extent of the surviving spirit of revolt. In other countries the "Holy Alliance" of monarchs and priesthoods committed countless atrocities. When a few years ago Portugal, which Englishmen had thought a "Catholic country," suddenly cast off its allegiance to the Church as well as to the throne, its citizens remembered the awful years after 1816. They are acutely remembered, too, in Spain and Italy. Even in England the clergy enjoyed their last spell of medieval power, and free-

thinkers and publishers of heterodox works were severely punished.

This dark period was alleviated in France and England by the insurgent movements which led to the second revolution across the Channel and the Reform Bill in England. During the agitation for the Reform Bill popular anger was violently directed against the clergy, who supported the corrupt political system; and in the new and stirring period after the passing of the Bill, Robert Owen and other anti-clerical leaders won great influence. The rare men of science were aloof from these struggles, and were almost invariably opposed to political radicalism; but it is obvious that the new atmosphere was favourable to them in the conflict which now rapidly thickened.

The speculative opinions which I have described as phantoms menacing the theological world were now more numerous and more definite. Astronomers continued to reveal the true proportions of the universe, and thus to make plain the littleness of mind of those writers of the Old Testament who had reflected the ignorance of their age. The stars were no longer mere pendants to "the two great lights," the sun and the moon. The solid "firmament" of the Pentateuch had no place in the new science. The "waters above the firmament" were clearly a figment of an ignorant age. The naive growth of grass and fruit-trees before the sun was made was very puzzling.

Geology had now quite established its suspicion of a vast age of the earth. No one who had the least acquaintance with the discoveries could doubt

that millions of years had been absorbed in the making of the rocks. We can test to-day how long it takes for a great river to deposit the sediment which will eventually, at the bottom of the sea, be compressed into rock; and, after making every allowance for different rates of formation at different periods, the sedimentary rocks of the globe demand some tens of millions of years for their development. Geology was also discarding its earlier ambition to discover physical proofs of a universal deluge. Even Dean Buckland, an eminent geologist and Churchman who long defended it, was compelled to yield.

Other branches of research were assisting to demolish the legend of a deluge, and were assailing the old traditions from many points of view. Travelers returned with accounts of remote populations of animals and plants which must have flourished for indefinite periods. The notion of the world having been re-peopled four thousand years before began to seem foolish. They spoke also of legends of other religions, such as those of India and China, which bore a disquieting resemblance to the Christian stories. The virtues of other religions, as well as of the older civilisations, were appreciated. Philology was gathering up the languages of the world into great evolutionary groups, and this in turn not only menaced the Deluge, but also the legend of the confusion of tongues at Babel.

The struggle became acute in the fourth decade of the nineteenth century. We are often reminded that it was mainly a struggle of scientific men against each other, but this undoubted fact must

not mislead us. The conservative men of science were defending the Christian legends and the clergy. New discoveries and speculations will always be met with healthy criticism and scepticism in science, but the intense and fiery struggles of the early nineteenth century were based on *Genesis*. When we find an able geologist pleading for some sort of Deluge near the close of the nineteenth century, this fact is clear enough. But it is also quite apparent in the earlier days. The clergy denounced as hostile to religion each scientific discovery which conflicted with the literal reading of *Genesis*, and the more religious students of science attempted to make the facts harmonise with the needs of the clergy.

The first great conflict was over the six days of creation. It was apparent quite early in the century that the story indelibly recorded in the rocks themselves did not accord with the story of creation in *Genesis*. Quite certainly the animals and plants of the coal-beds, for instance, were separated by an enormous period of time from the animals and plants of, say, the Eocene Period. The literal belief in six days was therefore quickly defeated. I need not tell the details of the struggle, or reproduce all the epithets which clerical writers and preachers showered upon the new art of deciphering the chronicle of the rocks. There were, as I said, many clergymen in the geological world, and they emphasised the gravity of the evidence. The clergy had to acknowledge their error; an error, they said, not in the Bible, but in their interpretation of it. One must remember, however,

that large numbers of clergymen, and some prelates of distinction, continued to defy the evidence of geology down to the end of the nineteenth century.

To most of the clergy it now became clear that the word "day" in the first chapter of *Genesis* meant "period." The Hebrew word *iom* became familiar all over Europe, and its almost magical qualities were greatly admired. In point of fact, there was no need to appeal to the Hebrew text at all. The word "day" in most languages may be used figuratively. We speak of things happening "in our day" when we may mean our generation. But that the Hebrew writer used the word in the sense of "period," that he had the vaguest perception of æons of time, no properly informed clergyman would say to-day. The old legend is simply a naive bit of folk-lore, and one looks back with amusement on the immense library of books that were written about it in the nineteenth century. The clergy have wasted an incalculable energy and obstinacy upon an hallucination from which their supposed privilege of special divine assistance did not in the least save them. Indeed, many of them still linger in the *iom* stage. As late as 1909 a representative of the Bible League challenged me to debate *Genesis* and science, and for two nights, before a large London audience, Mr. Tuckwell solemnly and vigorously defended the Victorian interpretation of *Genesis*!

The battle of the *iom* lasted decades. It was complicated by the need to give some sort of meaning to the "evening" which closes each "day" in the first chapter of *Genesis*, and the more ortho-



dox of the early geologists suggested that the text meant that great catastrophes had closed each of the lengthy periods into which the geological record might be divided. They found what geologists call "unconformities"—breaches in the smooth transition from one series of rocks to another—here and there in the record, and these were said to be the traces of the catastrophes or "evenings." A mighty and, to us, almost incredible battle waged over the subject. Advanced clergymen everywhere supported the "sound" men of science (the catastrophists) and expounded to admiring audiences how science beautifully confirmed and elucidated the word of God; while the majority of the clergy, who remained ignorant and obstinate, belaboured the liberals for listening to the seductions of Baal and deserting the literal interpretation.

Under the splendid lead of Sir Charles Lyell, whose *Principles of Geology* was published in 1830, the semi-religious theory of catastrophes was, after a terrific struggle, defeated, and the clergy were once more compelled to "move on." In the same period educated people were forced to abandon the story of a universal flood, and a second breach was made in the authority of the Old Testament and the clergy. The story of the Deluge was so plainly told that it could not be abandoned without an even fiercer and more prolonged struggle.<sup>1</sup> As the geologists pressed, the clergy retreated. Perhaps it was only a partial flood, and did not extend

<sup>1</sup> Religious people find it convenient to forget that Christ accepted the story of Noah and the Flood (see *Matthew*, xxiv, 38 and *Luke*, xvii, 26).

to America and Australia; perhaps—after further pressure—it was a large local flood in which an estimable farmer named Noah, with his family and cattle, escaped, and the story had been garbled before it reached the sacred writer. In the end the original legend was discovered in the ruins of Nineveh, and the whole story was laughingly abandoned. But the reader of our generation must try to appreciate how the clergy maintained this hopeless battle over an old Semitic legend for half a century, and what prestige they lost in consequence.

The tide was now, in the forties, pouring in upon the old theological world. Radicalism was fiercely assailing the clergy for their social and political reaction. Historians were dissolving the authority of the Bible and exposing the gross errors of Church history. Science was contradicting the preachers on an increasing number of points. A clergyman could no longer read to his congregation the story of creation, of the Garden of Eden, of the Deluge, of the Tower of Babel, and so on, but some cultivated person or thoughtful artisan could point out that “science” disputed these things. The confusion of tongues was openly derided by philologists. The Garden of Eden was successively located, under the pressure of travellers, in Mesopotamia, Cashmir, and eventually the Arctic Circle. The Dead Sea was proved by travellers to be totally different from what the clergy had said for centuries. The statue of Lot’s wife, which might be “seen to this day,” was a myth based on the temporary formation of needles of rock.

This struggle, the extent and intensity of which the man or woman of our generation cannot dimly realise, was, nevertheless, only a matter of outposts. In principle it was serious enough. The clergy had universally, officially, and emphatically taught that the Bible was literally inspired and could contain no error. If it proved to contain errors, it and their prestige were dangerously hurt. But there was worse beyond. The very foundation of the Christian scheme—the Fall of the parents of all mankind, leading to the need of redemption—was found in the early chapters of *Genesis*, and science was moving ominously in the direction of that legend. This, in point of fact, proved to be the centre of the next and even more vehement struggle, and to it I will devote a chapter.

## CHAPTER II

### EVOLUTION AND RELIGION

It is not unusual for the clergy of our time to dismiss the great battles in which their predecessors fought and fell with the genial assurance that it was "all a mistake." There can be no conflict of science and religion; they are, as it were, friendly nations which do not officially quarrel, but there lies between them a stretch of debatable ground, and advanced parties from either side may here meet and break a lance.

With the main part of this contention, that there can be no quarrel between science and religion, I will deal in the last chapter of this section. But these modern clerics are neither accurate nor very penetrating in their light disavowal of the earlier struggle. On the part of scientific men there was no excursion beyond the limits of their proper domain. It was the precise function of astronomy to ascertain the features and the origin of the universe; it was the strict task of geology to determine, as far as possible, the antiquity of the earth and to interpret the succession of its various populations; it was the legitimate place of other sciences to trace the origin of the plurality of languages, to unveil the origin and

early history of man, to collect and compare the religious beliefs of peoples.

And there was no mistake on the part of the divines. It was undoubtedly, and officially, part of the Christian creed that the Bible was an inspired narrative, and "inspiration" has ceased to have a definite meaning since divines began to admit that an inspired writer could err. There was a genuine and rapidly increasing conflict of science and Christianity. To say that the Christian Churches had erred materially for fifteen centuries in teaching that the Bible was a truthful and inspired record of origins is really to deal them a ponderous blow. Protestantism, especially, had pressed the Bible upon Europe as "the divine word." The first severe shock was when science proved that the Bible contained numerous errors; for I take it that it is not necessary to-day to linger over those new and subtle "interpretations" of *Genesis* which delighted and consoled the Victorian faithful.

But another and more really fundamental doctrine was threatened as the nineteenth century wore on. In the eighteenth century it had been recognised on both sides that such a claim as that of Lord Monboddo, that men were descended from monkeys, was altogether destructive of Christianity. If that were true, there was no temptation in the Garden of Eden, no Fall, and consequently no need of Redemption. Paul had very emphatically fixed the connection. All men died in Adam, and therefore all men must be born again in Christ. We have no need to read again the religious

literature of that period in order to appreciate the concern with which divines observed the further advance of science in this direction.

When the antiquity of the earth was settled the struggle was understood by divines to be over. I mean, of course, by the better informed clergy, for the majority still literally believed in the six days of creation. The better educated, however, or those who were more exposed to informed criticism, suavely accepted the teaching of geology. But it was understood that God had created each species of animals and plants that had appeared in those dim geological ages, and most decisively was it held that the crowning act of creation, the making of man, must be accepted in the terms of *Genesis*.

Now the advanced forces of the various sciences were already creeping round these positions. The doctrine of evolution persisted steadily from the eighteenth century. In 1831 there were famous debates on the subject in the French Academy. St. Hilaire advocated evolution; Baron Cuvier powerfully opposed. In Germany Goethe and other students of science had long been convinced of evolution. The idea was welcomed far beyond learned circles. Some years ago I unearthed a series of articles which appeared in G. J. Holyoake's popular journal, *The Oracle*, as early as 1842, applying the doctrine of evolution to the living world. In 1844 an anonymous work entitled *Vestiges of Creation* caused a sensation throughout England. The author (Robert Chambers) was a Christian, but he was convinced of the truth of evolution, and he sought to harmonise it with the

Bible. Public attention was now—fifteen years before the *Origin of Species* appeared—fully attracted to the theory, and the clergy were considerably agitated.

At the same time their position was approached from another side. The science of pre-historic man was taking shape. Stone implements were coming to light all over Europe, and it was suspected that these indicated a race or races that existed long before the supposed creation of Adam. For the most part these implements, and the few human bones which were found (though these were then admitted by very few scientists), were ascribed to “ante-diluvian man,” but these pestilential students of science were in some quarters claiming a vast early period for the existence of man himself. Indeed, another set of investigators, who were busy among the ruins of Egypt and Mesopotamia, declared that the pyramids themselves, which mark an advanced stage in the development of the Egyptian civilisation, were older than Adam.

The next great issue was, therefore, the antiquity of man. Boucher de Perthes, the French physician who had made the first large collection of stone implements, and had at first (1847) ascribed them to man before the Flood, now gathered remains of such definite antiquity that he was compelled to claim even hundreds of thousands of years for the human race. A European combat ensued over the age of mankind, and the pulpits and religious journals once more launched their epithets upon the men of science.

It is sometimes said by the modern clergy that this phase of the battle was peculiarly unhappy because the Old Testament gave no date for the creation of man. A date fancifully worked out by Archbishop Usher is said to have been mistakenly defended as if it were part of the inspired record. The clergy of the earlier days seem to have known the Old Testament better than their modern successors. Any person who cares to make the inquiry will find that the Old Testament gives, from Adam onward, the date of the birth of each eldest son, and this constitutes a perfectly definite chronology down to a time when we can check the Hebrew history by contemporary records. The Bible *does* give a chronology of early mankind, and, strange as it seems to us that educated people should half a century ago have accepted the stupendous ages given to the patriarchs, the clergy and the orthodox laity stood by the Bible. If the men of science were right, there was a trail of inaccuracy throughout the Pentateuch, and the whole biblical version of the origin of man was gravely menaced.

The men of science were, of course, right, and clerical prestige suffered another blow in strict proportion to the tenacity and ardour with which the clergy had defended the old position. It is not my purpose to recall these campaigns in any detail. Few of our generation have any idea of the terrific struggles which centred about these successive points, but I have space only to describe the significance of the repeated defeats of the clergy and of those men of science who aided them.



Another breach was made in the authority of the Bible. Once more the clergy had to strike their tents and retire.

Before this battle was won, the general question of the evolution of life was raised by the publication and furious discussion of Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859). The word *iom* had been the symbol and battle-ery of the earlier combat; the Hebrew phrase *lemino* ("after its kind") was the new cry. It resounded in Mechanics' Institutes and debating societies and learned gatherings. Did Jehovah specifically create each type of organism, or had there been an evolution of living forms? We must not forget that the battle was largely one of scientific men against each other; that the early evolutionists were heavily bullied by the great majority of their own colleagues. But one may justly wonder whether the opposition would have been so bitter and protracted had there not been this supposed sacred record to take into account, and had the clergy not been acutely interested in the discussion.

In the more liberal clerical circles it was now recognised that a distinction must be drawn between "inspiration" and what some divines have elegantly called "inerrancy." In recent times there have been clerical apologists who have reconciled their audiences with this distinction and hinted that critics of the Bible went astray in not recognising it. The critic of the Bible is entirely willing to follow the clergy in their successive retirements. In what precisely consists a divine inspiration which permits the writer to

err we do not clearly understand, but the things of faith are notoriously difficult. In the middle of the nineteenth century, however, the distinction, if it existed at all, was found only in the mind of critics of the Bible; those critics who accepted the facts of science, yet wished to bring them into some harmony with faith. The way of escape they held out to the clergy was the theory that inspiration meant some vague form of influence, possibly confined to matters of religious belief strictly understood and morals, and permitting the writer to err in matters of science and history.

But this typical expedient of Victorian liberalism did not at all appeal to the clergy. They struggled against evolution until the evidence was overwhelming; we shall see that a very much more respectable proportion of them than is generally believed still resist it. In the first place, men of robust mind and sense of humour were reluctant to admit these new and subtle meanings of the Hebrew text. The old Hebrew writer evidently believed, when he spoke of God creating trees and animals "each according to its kind," that God created out of nothing, as primitive peoples are apt to believe, the few hundred types of trees and animals with which he was acquainted. If God had not done this—if an age-long process of evolution had produced higher forms from lower—the Bible was wrong. In this candid view of the situation probably most people of any education agree to-day. The Bible was wrong. All the attempts to make *Genesis* accord with the scientific record are absurd. The writer of the famous first

chapter knew nothing about the early history of the earth. And the clergy knew that to tell the people this would gravely injure themselves.

The second serious ground for reluctance was deeper, and it is of permanent interest. In an age of increasing scepticism it was essential for the clergy to prove the existence of God from the visible world before they could speak to a man about revelation. We saw that Paley furnished at the beginning of the century the model of this type of argument. I will examine its logical value later, and here merely recount that this kind of appeal from nature to God now pervaded religious literature. Inevitably it took the form in the popular mind of a contest between science and the theologian. Here, said Paley, is a solar system wonderfully adapted to maintain life on our planet; therefore it was intelligently planned and constructed. But if the man of science could suggest a way in which the unintelligent forces of nature could evolve the solar system, without plan or guidance, the argument fails. Astronomers have done this, and no one now—except the Bishop of London and a few others who have not leisure to study astronomy—bases upon the solar system an argument for the existence of God.

Now the further science advanced in its natural interpretation of phenomena the less ground the theologian had for his purpose. We will see later the philosophic attempts to get out of this difficulty. One thing at a time. The clergy of the Victorian era, who were not as stupid as some of their successors suggest—were, indeed, a generally

finer body of men, though ignorant of science—saw this plainly. They had for decades been accustomed to point to the beauty of the rose, the sheen of the pheasant, or the song of the lark, and ask disdainfully if “mere matter” had produced these things. To arrange the whole biological world in one enormous evolutionary series, as was now proposed, robbed half their “sermons to atheists” of their value.

Naturally, the Victorian mind had “a new interpretation” to offer them. After fighting Darwinism stubbornly, vehemently, for a quarter of a century, the divines buried the great naturalist in Westminster Abbey and proclaimed that he had given the world a magnificent interpretation of the real meaning of “creation.” Some went so far—it is still occasionally done—as to recall that Darwin himself, in the closing paragraph of *The Origin of Species*, had stated that this was the purport of his work; though that passage was omitted by him from later editions, and, as his son has shown, he became and died definitely Agnostic. Whether he knew it or not, divines said, he had brought a revelation which did not merely not disturb the faith; it enriched and ennobled it. It is far grander and more god-like, they said, to set going and supervise a cosmic machine which will create millions of diverse forms than to charm them suddenly out of nothing.

This view lent itself to rhetoric, but not to clear conceptions in the public mind. God retreated very far back in time. The need for supervision was not admitted by many men of science. The

machinery conceived by Darwin to produce organic forms was not at all a kind of machinery that needed an intelligent engineer to frame and start it, as his own Agnosticism showed. This sort of creation was very elusive and unsatisfactory. Everything was being resolved into "natural causes." Already men of science were claiming that the few early living things were themselves naturally evolved. In short, there was no "creation" at all, since things were not made out of nothing. The great dogma of creation, which was written on the portals of the Bible, was becoming as nebulous as the dogma of inspiration.

Some vague perception of these things fired the Victorian clergy, and they fought. Again I refrain from picturesque details. Some idea of the issue will be given in the next chapter. They fought and, once more, lost. Not a man of science in the world to-day has the slightest doubt about evolution. Whether it was by way of natural selection, or by mutations, or whatever the agencies were, the fact of evolution is a fundamental principle of all science. The prestige of the clergy was further shaken. The great secession from the Churches increased.

But long before the issue was made plain the controversy entered upon an even more inflamed course. Darwin had not in his first work attempted to apply the principle of natural development to man. The great naturalist plainly perceived that the machinery of natural selection, aided by sexual selection, could explain also the evolution of man, but he felt that it was expedient first to

establish the existence of the machinery, and he wished to gather, in his patient and laborious way, an enormous mass of further and special proof in support of this fateful extension of his discovery. Wallace, who is usually associated with Darwin in the discovery, though there is no comparison whatever between the work of the two men, was a spiritist, and would, as afterwards transpired, resist this further application.

Happily, younger and more vigorous men of science now flung themselves into the fray. Three years before Darwin published *The Origin of Species* there was unearthed in Germany the skeleton of a man of the Old Stone Age. There is to-day no doubt whatever that this "Neanderthal man" had lived some two hundred thousand years ago, and was a specimen of a race lower in type than any existing race of savages. At the time there was, of course, a fierce discussion over the remains, but they were rightly appraised by many men of science and the task of bringing man into the new biological scheme was confidently undertaken. Huxley in England and Haeckel in Germany lent their great scientific ability to the work, and it was fortunate that their strength and courage equalled their skill. Huxley began almost immediately after the publication of Darwin's work to lecture on the relation of man to the lower animals, and in 1863 he published his lectures under the title *Evidence as to Man's Place in Nature*. In September of the same year Haeckel opened his defiant career at the Scientific Congress at Stettin by a bold avowal of belief in the evolution

of man; an avowal which, three years later, he followed up with his *General Morphology of Organisms*, fitly described by Huxley as "one of the greatest scientific works ever published," in which he embraced the entire living world in a comprehensive scheme of evolution. Darwin followed his disciples, and in 1871 published *The Descent of Man*.

The fury of the storm which now burst upon the few resolute evolutionists in England, France, and Germany cannot be appreciated by a generation which has witnessed nothing approaching it. The great majority of scientific men were opposed to the new doctrine, and the most acrid battles were fought within the academic world. I will not stay to consider how far this "scientific" opposition was due to concern for religion. The fact is that from the start the struggle turned largely on religion, for the few men of science who embraced the new theory were nearly all Agnostics, or at least heterodox to the verge of Agnosticism. There were a few Agnostics amongst their opponents, but some of these, like Virchow, notoriously strained the facts of science, for social reasons, in favour of a religious position which they did not themselves accept. The academic struggle was in a very large measure due to the fact that the new doctrine was opposed to prevailing religious views.

But this does not properly concern us, and it is grossly misleading for clerical writers to-day to recall this division of opinion of scientific men as if it justified their attitude. The interest of the contemporary clergy in the matter had not the

slightest regard for science, nor was their opposition based in the least on the reluctance of the scientific authorities. In every shade of arrogant and intimidating language they proclaimed that it was their place to decide the question of man's origin, and that the theory of evolution was hostile to religion. The grossest personalities were indulged in, and the pulpits and religious literature of England crackled and glowed with a volcanic outpour of rhetoric.

Carlyle, by no means a Christian, but deeply concerned about his own mystic religion as well as his reactionary social philosophy, called the new doctrine "a gospel of dirt." On that text the clergy luridly expatiated throughout England. They appealed to the most ignorant sentiments of the crowd, who were easily induced to resent the suggestion that "man came from a monkey," as it was popularly expressed. The new theory, and the infamy of its implication, were so easily grasped by the uneducated that interest in it penetrated to the lowest strata of the community, and popular humourists found in it a source of inspiration for several decades. I can myself remember that about the year 1875 even brands of matches were named "The Missing Link"; the great catch-phrase of the time. It is curious to reflect to-day that I then lived near the extensive zoological garden at Manchester (Bellevue), where the tail-less man-like apes were seen daily; yet in popular circles it was quite generally believed that the insuperable difficulty of the evolutionists was to explain man's lack of a tail !



In more serious circles the clergy urged the social implications of the new doctrine. It has since been established that Virehow, the great opponent of Darwinism in Germany, acted in the supposed interest of law and order by protecting the narrow and erroneous religious ideas of "the people." Prelates and preachers everywhere represented the new views as destructive of morality and dangerous to political authority. Their case may be summed up in the words which an eminent French prelate, Mgr. Ségur, applied to the Darwinian doctrines: "Their father is pride, their mother impurity, their offspring revolutions."<sup>1</sup> Religious passion of the worst sort was stirred throughout Europe.

The truth is that, as will appear later, after the middle of the nineteenth century the clergy had to contemplate a most comprehensive attack upon the old religious position. In 1861, the year in which Huxley began to lecture on the evolution of man, appeared *Essays and Reviews*, in which seven liberal divines of the Church of England ruthlessly undermined the accepted position in theology; and, in an appeal to the Privy Council, they defeated the ecclesiastical court which condemned

<sup>1</sup> In a little work which I wrote fourteen years ago, *Haeckel's Critics Answered*, I attributed these words to Lacordaire. The point was so unimportant to my argument that I quoted from memory. Yet this trivial slip on a point of no importance to my theme travelled through the Catholic press of the world, and as late as 1916 was gravely adduced in a London weekly by the secretary of the Catholic Truth Society (who omitted to say that it had occurred thirteen years earlier) as a sample of my inaccuracy! Seeing that I had written 32 books between 1903 and 1916, I take it as a great compliment to their accuracy that my bitterly hostile critics must go back so far to find an insignificant error.

them. In the following year, 1862, appeared Colenso's famous book. The Church was distracted and anxious, and the new scientific claims fell upon the ears of a nervous generation.

It made matters worse that the new claims were almost as disastrous to liberal theology as to the older theology. Thirty years of strife had, of course, begotten a minority of prudent divines who were for compromise. Dr. Jowett and other Broad Church leaders were successfully imposing this attitude upon the better educated clergy, and many were now disposed to reject the old idea of inspiration and withdraw any claim that the Old Testament authoritatively taught any version of the early history of the earth and of man. There were, broadly, three schools of divines. The overwhelming majority of the clergy, of all Churches, clung to the traditional position, and their rhetoric lashed itself into foam against the scientific rocks. There was then a school of "harmonisers"; a large group of divines who regarded themselves as sweetly reasonable and as the destined saviours of the Churches from a great peril. *Properly interpreted*, they said, the Old Testament was in perfect accord with science. We shall see something of their work in the next chapter. The third and very small group of cultivated divines abandoned all pretension to find science, or early history, in the Old Testament.

But, apart from a few extremely liberal and advanced men like Jowett, of the third group, all were agreed that some limit must be observed. They might, for instance, admit the evolution of

species—they might represent it as a really grander method of producing things—but they made certain reserves in regard to the rights of the Almighty and of the Church. God had created, in the literal sense, the *first* living things, or the germs of them; and at the other end of the biological scale he had created man. Let the Darwinians take the rest, and let them recognise that their science did not affect these theological reserves. Thus a period of harmony, in fact of most fruitful co-operation, of science and religion was forecast.

Upon this mild and genial prospect the heavy clouds of the new scientific claims descended. Haeckel in Germany and Huxley in England, the two mighty and fearless protagonists of the new truth, began simultaneously to teach the evolution of life and the evolution of man. Haeckel's *General Morphology* (1866) learnedly (for the time) speculated about the origin of life; Huxley in 1868 delivered his famous lecture on "The Physical Basis of Life," and from that time onward fought vigorously for what he called "abiogenesis"—the natural evolution of life. Tyndall, Lewes, Bastian, and other physiologists and physicists sustained the new claim. Herbert Spencer inaugurated his series of comprehensive and weighty volumes, which would one day form an encyclopædia of evolution.

This displacement of the Creator at the beginning of the biological scale coincided with the vigorous attack upon the belief in the special creation of man. Still there were divines who were willing

to meet the men of science. If the Creator could design a mechanism for evolving millions of living forms from a few simple primitive types, he could conceivably provide mechanism, a set of natural laws or forces, for evolving life out of the inorganic. There was, it is true, a special reason for reluctance here. Life was universally alleged to be "immaterial," and to admit its natural origin seemed to be a grave concession to materialism. There was, however, a way of meeting this difficulty, as we shall see, and some divines were disposed to grant, or at least not actively to resist, the claim of the men of science. Huxley and Tyndall candidly avowed that their conviction of the natural origin of life was an act of faith, and they emphatically refused to admit that, as Bastian and others claimed, living things are in nature to-day "spontaneously" generated.

But the attempt to displace the Creator at the other end of the scale was more serious. The essence of Christianity was, in those days, not the moral superiority of the creed, but its dogma of the redemption of mankind by an incarnate God. From what had humanity been redeemed? On this again there was virtual unanimity. Every branch of the Christian Church officially taught that mankind had been condemned to eternal damnation for the sin of Adam, and that the Son of God alone could expiate the crime and redeem the race. The few divines who were already seeking a new meaning of the word "redemption" were scouted by the whole body of the clergy. It was said to be absolutely impossible to admit that man was

evolved from a lower type of animal hundreds of thousands of years before Adam. If that were true, the whole version of man's primitive history with which the Bible opened was absolutely false, and had no relation to the facts; yet the theory of Christ in the New Testament was wholly based upon that version.

Moreover, the new theory seemed to have very grave consequences for the fundamental truths of religion, apart from the specific doctrines of Christianity. It was a fundamental principle of religion, ardently held by Unitarians and Deists as well as by the older Churches, that man had a spiritual and immortal soul. But the ape had certainly not a spiritual and immortal soul. No one in those years seriously suggested the subterfuge that even the lower animals might have immortal souls. How, then, could a spiritual and immortal being have been evolved from a being devoid of those high attributes? Did an increase of intelligence or a refinement of emotion withdraw a mortal organism from the realm of death? And *when*, on the new theory, did man become immortal? Pre-historic science was slowly arranging the story of primitive man, and it showed a gradual and slow rise of intelligence. There was no dramatic moment, no sudden elevation, when a spiritual soul might be presumed to have entered the universe.

Thus the Victorian divines had very serious ground to oppose science. The conflict was certainly not due to excursions from their legitimate fields of either theologians or men of science. The

discoveries which men of science announced in their proper fields of research conflicted with the official and universal teaching of Christianity. To say to-day that Adam and Eve and the Fall are not a part of the essence of Christianity is merely to say that Christianity has undergone an essential change. It has every right to do so, provided that it at the same time abandons its old claim of a particular revelation and divine guidance; but the clergy of fifty years ago quite well understood the Christianity which they professed—the Christianity of every Christian, saint and scholar and peasant, for fourteen centuries. If the new men of science were right, Christianity was wrong. Therefore they flung themselves ardently, unscrupulously, into the campaign against science. Darwinism was denounced from one end of Europe to the other. Abuse and misrepresentation were freely used. The social order and the integrity of morals were emphatically declared to be endangered by the progress of the new opinions.

## CHAPTER III

### THE RETREAT OF THE CLERGY

It is difficult to follow this struggle in strict chronological order because of the straggling nature of the retreat of the clergy. One cannot even assign a decade in which they, as a body, abandoned their opposition to the teaching of science. The struggle has been spread over half a century, and the clergy have yielded only in proportion to the pressure of their particular environment. Indeed, the struggle is still far from over. "We are all evolutionists to-day," the clergy frequently remark; and at times they insinuate that many are hostile to Christianity because they are ignorant of the advance of Christian thought in the last few decades.

These insinuations are totally false. Every phase of the development of the last half-century lives amongst us still, and a very considerable proportion of both clergy and laity linger to-day even in the stage of belief which Huxley assailed half a century ago. During the last ten years I have lectured in nearly all the large towns of England, Scotland, and Australasia on the evolution of life and of man, and have found that an amazing proportion of the less educated members of the Churches regard both as fantastic speculations inconsistent with their faith. In some places

where I have delivered these lectures under the auspices of ordinary lecture-societies the officials have been compelled by the violent protests which afterwards appeared in the press to refrain from inviting me again. As I usually permit questions after the lectures, I have been enabled to gauge the extent and the quality of the opposition. I should say that the majority of the clergy and believers, in all the Churches of the United Kingdom, still regard the doctrine of evolution as an irreligious speculation and cling, in a hazy way, to the doctrine of special creation.

The literature, periodical and otherwise, which reflects the mind of this majority entirely confirms my estimate. The parochial magazines of rural and suburban congregations are notoriously crude, but I refer more particularly to what is claimed to be ordinarily liberal and enlightened literature. The immense output of books and pamphlets which followed the appearance, in the last decade, of an English translation of Haeckel's *Riddle of the Universe* suffices to prove my point. I have selected the more serious and widely read of these works for examination in my *Haeckel's Critics Answered* and in later editions of the *Riddle*, and the religious student of science who imagines that "we are all evolutionists to-day" will there find matter to undeceive him. He will find such men as Dr. R. F. Horton speaking of "the matchless revelation of the first chapters of *Genesis*," and Dr. F. Ballard contemptuously scouting the idea of the natural origin of life (and in his ponderous later work, *Haeckel's Monism False*, equally con-



temptuous of the idea of the evolution of mind). These men are not scholars, but they represent a level of Christian culture very much higher than that of a rural congregation. Below that level is the stratum of believers who are still influenced by the old type of harmoniser of science and *Genesis*, like the Rev. Mr. Tuckwell (see p. 52) or Dr. Arthur Pierson (*Many Infallible Proofs*). Below these is the thickest stratum of belief—the Archæan deposit, so to say—consisting of the simple-minded majority of believers who have never read or heard a clear statement of the teaching of science and are still at the early Victorian level.

The clergy have, in other words, usually moved on only in proportion as they were pushed. Where their congregations are not acquainted with the advance of science or the solidity of its conclusions, they still repeat the ancient language and leave their hearers under the impression, if they do not explicitly convey the impression, that *Genesis* gives us “a matchless revelation” of the early history of the world and man. Indeed, in some Churches, such as the Wesleyan and the Roman Catholic, the older view is still virtually enforced and the teaching of science is most ludicrously resisted. Let me illustrate the point from the literature of the Church of Rome.

The Church of Rome is notoriously slow to admit enlightenment, but few who do not read its literature or take some interest in its life can have any conception of the extent to which it still defies the accepted teaching of science. I chanced, in my

theological studies thirty years ago, to have the guidance of one of the most liberal and informed of the London priests, yet one must look back with some amusement to-day on the kind of audacious ideas we then whispered to each other. We were in the stage of harmonising science and the Old Testament; we learned our science, of course, from ancient works like those of Cardinal Wiseman or contemporary French volumes like Moigno's *Splendeurs de la Foi*. As to evolution, we followed Dr. St. George Mivart, who occasionally visited us. We admitted evolution, but not the evolution of the first living things or of the human mind. I remember still how, misinformed as I was by the preposterous literature which Catholics read, I used to lay it down dogmatically to my students, in my lectures on philosophy, that there was so rigid a barrier between the living and the non-living that science could not artificially produce an organic (to say nothing of organised) compound. At that time, of course, chemistry had produced numbers of organic compounds.

This little haven of comparative liberalism of ours was, however, not at all typical of the Catholic world. Indeed, the many such little nests of modernism were, after my secession, ruthlessly destroyed by Pope Pius X. The politeness of English writers has spared the ignorance of this extraordinary Pope, who ruled the Church of Rome from 1903 to 1914. One should read the works of M. A. Houtin, especially his *La Question Biblique au XX<sup>e</sup> Siècle* (1906), if one would realise the full atrocity of his pontificate. He was absolutely

ignorant of science and history, and he not only held, but imposed upon his Church in the twentieth century, the most literal early-Victorian confidence in the legends of the Pentateuch. Of the early history of the world and man he knew only what *Genesis* taught, and he showered maledictions upon the "false science" which questioned its literal accuracy. For him Adam and Eve and the serpent, Noah and Jonah, were as real as the indignant cardinals who surrounded him.

But one must not imagine that Pius X imposed his naive faith upon a generally enlightened and reluctant Church. In rural France or Ireland he, it is true, evoked a sincere response to his pathetic ignorance, but even in England and the United States Catholics were, and are, as a body singularly out of date. I speak not of congregations of poor and necessarily uninstructed Irish Catholics, but of the literature which circulates among intelligent Catholic artisans and all but the very small group of "modernists." It is only a few years since there was sent to me, from America, the report of a speech in which Mr. Hilaire Belloc pleaded for the founding of a new "Truth Society" to purvey sound science to the people; and the immediate ground of his appeal was the current scientific theory of the evolution of the horse, which he scornfully demolished! The works of the late Jesuit Father Gerard, decades out of date as they are in scientific matters and based upon ancient and worthless authorities, will be known to many as lamentable examples of "Catholic truth." The one Catholic of some distinction in biology—more properly, in a particular

branch of natural history—the German Jesuit, Father Wasmann, holds a half-hearted theory of evolution which no other biologist in the world would call other than a weird muddle of medieval philosophy and modern science.

The point may, however, be dismissed or definitively settled by a glance at the most important and most authoritative work which Catholic scholars have produced of late years. This is *The Catholic Encyclopædia*, produced in the United States and written by the foremost Catholic scholars of that and other countries. Any reader who cares to run over the series of ponderous volumes will be astounded at the extraordinary defiance of science which they exhibit.

Dr. J. Driscoll, the President of a New York Seminary, deals with “Adam” and “Eve.” In the former article he, while pronouncing that Adam was “the first man,” vaguely leaves the Catholic some liberty to allegorise. Under “Eve,” however, he takes the story quite literally, except that he, again vaguely, leaves some liberty in regard to the childish legend of Adam’s rib. The story of Eden is a repetition of the famous adventures of the legend of the Flood in Smith’s *Dictionary* half a century ago. Under the heading “Eden” you are referred to “Paradise, Terrestrial” (which gave the Encyclopædists two years’ grace). Under “Paradise” you are told to await “Terrestrial Paradise.” And at length, in 1912, the Rev. Dr. Driscoll tackled the subject, and he says not a word as to whether it is to be taken literally! Under “Deluge” the learned Jesuit, Father Maas,

assures Catholics, in the year 1908, that there certainly was a Flood which destroyed the whole human race except Noah and his family ! The article on " Evolution " seems to have been beyond the resources of the American Church, and it is entrusted to the German Jesuit Wasmann and the Dutch Jesuit Muckermann. It admits a limited range of evolution as " a hypothesis," not extending to the origin of life, and formally concludes that " there is no evidence in favour of an ascending evolution of organic forms " and " there is no trace of even a merely probable argument in favour of the animal origin of man " ! That is the best that Catholic scholarship can produce, in the year 1909, in what is said to be the most free and enlightened branch of the Church of Rome.

The Wesleyan body is scarcely more advanced than the Roman Catholics. It contains some ministers of distinction and liberality, but the great majority of its preachers have congregations of an intellectually backward character and are themselves generally wedded to the literal view of the Bible. Officially, also, the body is reactionary. Four years ago I listened to the maiden sermon of a quite intelligent youth, of very fair general education, who had just completed his studies in a large modern college for the Wesleyan ministry. To my astonishment he selected as his theme the crossing of the Red Sea by Moses and the Israelites, which he accepted as literally as a Scottish crofter does ; and to the many other biblical miracles he quoted he added the *labarum* of Constantine and other medieval fairy-tales. And this youth had studied

for the ministry under the very shadow of a modern and ably conducted university !

The Baptists are a little better than the Wesleyans ; the Congregationalists are the least reactionary of the Nonconformists. The Church of England preserves, in its rich variety, every shade and phase of the evolution of Christian thought. It cannot be said to-day to hold any particular version of Christianity ; but the version which it officially teaches, and which is followed by the uneducated majority, is the early Victorian version.

This extraordinary jumble of ancient and modern views within each branch of the Christian Church, which any reader will be able to verify from his own local experience, makes it difficult for the historian to describe the course of the conflict of science and theology. If he represents the Churches as still adhering to the version of origins contained in the Pentateuch, the more liberal clergyman makes a spirited protest. If he dwells upon the progress in enlightenment of the minority of the clergy, the majority lament that he should make so much of the disloyalty to the Bible of a few and overlook their own resolute fidelity. It will be better, therefore, to take each of these phases of belief, not as stages which the clergy have successively occupied, but as alternative defences which are, in different circumstances, put forward to-day against the common enemy. My purpose is not so much to sketch the history of the struggle as to show that the Churches met their present crisis with a greatly diminished prestige. This can best be done by showing that each of the varied

attitudes they assume in face of modern science is indefensible.

Over what I have called the Archæan section of the Christian community I will not linger. In geological works one will find a scale of the rocks, an imaginary section of the earth's crust, and at the base of it is a very thick body of rocks known as "the Archæan." They are obscure and primitive, and are said to be as large as all the other sections put together. The phrase may usefully be applied to the lowest stratum of Christian belief. The millions of believers who fall into this category belong to the mass of the rural and industrial workers. The ridiculously thin film of education which the State gives them and the laborious nature of their lives generally isolate them from the progress of culture, and the clergy find it easy to detain them in the early-Victorian phase of faith. The class, however, does not coincide with what is called the working class. In the large towns and cities, as I have pointed out, great bodies of the workers have either entirely abandoned the Churches, or are retained only because some courageous and better-informed preacher (like the Rev. Rhondda Williams, for instance) puts before them a more liberal version of the faith. On the other hand, many a middle-class congregation is just as backward in this respect as a rural parish; and people of wealth or title occasionally give large sums in support of this pathetic attempt to defend "the word of God" in all its purity.

I calculate that, numerically, the majority of believers and clergy of all Churches still belong to

this Archæan group. In the present utter confusion of the religious world, however, it is difficult to appraise numbers, and I lay no stress on this. The circulation of such extraordinary weeklies as *The Catholic Times*, *The Methodist Times*, etc., to say nothing of a shower of religious weeklies with less circulation, seems to confirm my estimate. Religious literature and journalism of the most reactionary character still find an immense number of readers.

Yet the issue between religion and science is here so plain that one would not waste time arguing about it. Believers of this class are wedded to the legends of *Genesis*. Here and there they may rise to a bold declaration that the evolution of species (not of the first living things or of man) is a legitimate "speculation" on the part of scientific men, or even a suspicion that the first page of *Genesis* need not be taken literally. As a rule, however, they regard evolution as a rather humorous fiction of certain anti-religious men of science, and all are agreed about the reality and solemn importance of Adam and Eve, the Garden of Eden, the Flood (which may have been partial), the age of Methuselah, Jonah and the whale, Balaam and the ass, etc. On these things, as I said, there is no arguing. The legends of the Old Testament have no relation to the early history of man as it is now quite established. One often wonders what can be the psychology of men and women who prefer the authority of crassly ignorant preachers to the quite unanimous authority, on these points, of all the scientific men of the world; but on inquiry one



finds that they are largely deluded by assurances that the men of science are hopelessly divided on these matters, and that the men of divinity are in impressive agreement. The detention of so large a proportion, if not the majority, of Christian believers at such a grade of culture and error is one of the worst counts against the Churches.

Then there are the reconeilers, a vanishing group in our day. The oracles of this group are immersed in the scientific literature of the last (or last but one) generation. They quote Quatrefages and Agassiz and Sir J. W. Dawson and other venerable Georgians and Victorians, and their innocent victims imagine that they hear the last word of "sound science." They then discover in the Hebrew text profound meanings which would astonish a learned Rabbi, and, with a little good will, the two ends are brought together. Science and the Pentateuch are in complete harmony. God actually inspired this modern development of science in order that in its light we might at last read the true meaning of the old oracles.

On this form of theological pastime there is no need to linger, as it is dying out. The fact that for centuries learned as well as simple Christians really believed in Noah's remarkable house-boat, and the ages of the patriarchs, and such things, reminds us that the hypnotic influence of religion may produce an almost indefinite degree of credulity; but even this credulity is strained by the suggestion that three thousand years ago God communicated to certain obscure Hebrews the real story of the world and man, and then moved or permitted them to

write it in such fashion that no one should have even a faint understanding of it until, three millennia later, a very irreligious generation arose and interpreted it. There *are* limits to one's admiration of the marvellous. And the theory is not improved by the statement that an inspired writer had to speak in "the language of his time." I can easily convey the modern scientific version of the origin of the world and man to audiences of no higher mental level than the ancient Hebrews, or to children. It is utterly preposterous to say that in ancient Judæa it was necessary to talk meaningless nonsense. The writers of the Pentateuch plainly knew nothing about the formation of the world and the early history of man; and to-day we find in the debris of Assyrian and Babylonian literature the real sources of their legends.

Both these phases of belief have to pass away, and experience assures us that, as these simple-minded believers learn the truth, they will in increasing numbers desert their blind guides. The process, indeed, is taking place rapidly. Adam and Eve, the Garden of Eden, the Deluge, and the whole naive contents of the Pentateuch are mercilessly satirised in popular literature, in the workshop, even on the stage. We base the ideals of our children on these legends, and then turn them into a world where they are daily ridiculed. The situation cannot last, and, with the disillusioning of millions of our people, the falling credit of the clergy will sink still lower.

Doubtless there will then be a growth of the next phase of Christian belief, which is at present con-

finer to the more thoughtful or those who are more exposed to the teaching of science. There are degrees within the class. Some cherish a feeble hope that the Old Testament will prove not quite so comprehensively wrong as critics say. They hang upon the lips of "reverent" Assyriologists, like Professor Sayce, who belabour the Higher Critics for them. One day they are saddened to learn that the walls of Jericho have been discovered, and therefore the picturesque legend of their overthrow must be abandoned. Another day they are relieved to hear that some name recorded in the Old Testament, or a name something like it, has been found on a monument, and therefore the inspired writer actually did say something—not very important—which was true. It is a precarious kind of religious life, and, as science never makes any discoveries to encourage these folk, I will not linger over them.

Some, again, adopt a new or higher method of "interpreting" the Pentateuch. From Sir Oliver Lodge, for instance, they learn that "the Fall" is a profound allegory; it means that at a certain date prehistoric men became conscious of moral distinctions and began to "fall." May it not be—to use a favourite phrase of Sir Oliver's—that the first Paleolithic man to make the discovery, or to fall, was named Adam? Science cannot disprove this. The method is susceptible of a very large extension, but it finds so little favour that we may pass on.

The general feeling in this class of believers is that the whole nineteenth-century struggle was a mis-

take. The Old Testament, they say, contains such splendid moral literature that it may well be called "inspired." But God never intended that we should pin our faith to its cosmological and historical legends. They make up a wonderful literature; a unique record of a nation's religious progress. Let us treasure them, and teach them (as literal truth) to children and uneducated congregations. As to cosmology and history, we have in modern culture a revelation that, in its splendour and illumination, may well rank with and complete the moral and religious revelation contained in the Bible.

Probably this is the average faith of the more thoughtful type of cleric and layman with whom I am now concerned. They imagine that the era of conflict is over, and that the clergy may, by a renewed devotion to moral culture and theology proper, recover much of the prestige which the blunders of their predecessors forfeited. When the mass of the uneducated faithful and the more ignorant clergy have moved up to this level, they say, there will open an era of religious peace and recuperation.

One can treat this position with respect, wherever one finds it advocated without arrogance and pleaded without dishonesty, but the modern spirit has some critical observations to pass upon it. In the first place, one fears that these more enlightened believers are not guiltless in regard to their less enlightened brethren. They contemplate with equanimity the imposition on uneducated congregations and innocent children of a view of the Bible

which they regard as false. The clergy officially and severally assist in this imposition.

In the second place, these moderately liberal Christians seem to purchase their optimism at the price of some very superficial thinking. Quite plainly, if the doctrine of the Fall is sacrificed, the centre of gravity of Christianity is changed. A new meaning has to be found for the doctrine of redemption, and we shall see that the effort to find this leads divines into a veritable bog of unsafe and contradictory theories. It is absolutely impossible to retain the traditional Christian doctrine of Christ's mission and reject the story of Eden; and any man or woman who to-day clings to the childish story of the fall of Adam and Eve would retain what we definitely know to be untrue. The story of primitive man, as reconstructed by even an orthodox Roman Catholic like Sir B. Windle, is hopelessly inconsistent with it.

Let us suppose, however, that these advancing believers are acquainted with the facts, and reject entirely the legend of Eden and the Fall. To imagine that they have on that account entered a region of belief where no further conflict with science is possible is an illusion. Quite apart from the possibility of encounters with historians and students of comparative religion, which will be considered later, this new theology still moves in a region where it may cross, and does repeatedly cross, the lines of science. The struggle over the Pentateuch was but the prelude to a more fateful, if less noisy and embittered, conflict. I have spoken, not of the bankruptcy of Christianity or

clericalism or theology, but of religion. The war, we saw, deals as severe a blow at theism, at the most fundamental of religious doctrines, as at the Churches or the Christian ethic. And theism meets the blow with a strength and prestige reduced quite as much as those of Christian theology. It is a mistake to suppose that if a man "quietly drops the Old Testament overboard" (as my professor of theology urged me to do thirty years ago), and restricts himself to a theistic faith, associated with a vague belief in the superiority of the Christian form of religion, he will henceforth live in amity with modern culture. That is the next and final point we have to consider in this section.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE PERMANENT CONFLICT OF SCIENCE AND RELIGION

IN this section I am not considering difficulties which the new Christian may experience owing to his faith in the New Testament. It will be more convenient to consider those under the heading of history. Nor do I intend to enlarge upon the question of miracles. The abandonment of the belief in miracles under pressure from scientific men has always amused me. Science has, in my opinion, nothing to say about miracles. It is simply a question of evidence. There are no "iron laws of nature." There are but uniform and unvarying processes or sequences, and the only ground for calling them uniform is experience. If a man can prove the occurrence of a variation from them, either at modern Lourdes or in ancient Judæa, science has no *a priori* objection. It is the evidence that is lacking.

But the fundamental principle of religion, the belief in spiritual realities (the soul and God), has and will always retain a close relation to the advance of science. It is patently absurd to base a hope of peace and security upon the glib statement that religion will henceforward confine itself to the spiritual and science to the material. This

distinction, invented by superficial writers like Father Gerard, is an empty phrase. It is enough to refer to the science of psychology, the science of mind. If any man thinks that, because our psychologists to-day disown the ambition to investigate the *nature* of mind, the scientists of to-morrow will be equally obliging, he has a large but very precarious trust. Mind is one of the realities which it is the function of science to elucidate; and quite clearly the man of science may in this come into conflict with the divine. It is the same with the belief in God. Science has no concern with gods or spirits; but when on every side religious writers base their belief on natural phenomena which, they say, "science cannot explain," they once more directly provoke conflict.

Now the far greater part of what we may call the middle class of the religious world, the large class with which I dealt in the latter part of the previous chapter, are actually involved in a comprehensive struggle of this description. They would confine themselves, they say, to the spiritual world, and have men of science confine themselves to the material world. But who is going to settle the frontiers? It is entirely ludicrous for the writers of this group—the Ballards and Gerards and Begbies and Williams and Hortons and Campbells and Zahms, and so on—to assure their readers that the conflict with science is over. In the very works in which they do this they flourish little fragments of ancient science in the face of all the living masters of biology and anthropology, and vow that they will never surrender!



Two illustrations of this will suffice. The first relates to the origin and nature of life, apart from the particular question of the human mind. These Ballards and Hortons and Gerards, and other popular oracles of the religious middle class, take their stand at the very frontiers of the living world, and say to men of science : “ Here our province—the immaterial world—begins. None of your materialism on this sacred ground.” And since it is the notorious ambition of biologists to discover a natural origin of life, and to identify the vital principle with the inorganic forces of the universe, you have at once the material of as pretty a quarrel of divines and scientists as ever enlivened the nineteenth century.

I say you have the material of a quarrel, but there is in fact no quarrel. It takes two to make a quarrel. Biologists disdainfully ignore the clergy and get on with their work. That is the only sense in which, on this subject, there is “ no conflict of science and religion.” I can imagine the fine disdain with which Professor Loeb or Professor Starling or Professor Delage or Professor Verworn would learn that Dr. Ballard or Dr. Guinness Rogers distrusted their work and opposed their conclusions. No, there is no quarrel of science and religion here; because what the clergy say about such matters no longer counts. These modern controversialists, who are supposed to have been taught wisdom by the errors of their predecessors, are doing precisely what their Victorian brethren did. They are, on the ground of religion, urging their followers to defy the collective

opinion of the proper scientific authorities; and they will suffer the same fate as their predecessors. There is not a biologist of any distinction who does not now consider that life was naturally evolved out of the inorganic elements on this planet.

These popular clerical writers sustain the faith of their followers by a delusive method; delusive in effect, though their own knowledge of the subject is in every case so scanty and superficial that they may have a large measure of innocence. They make the whole question turn upon the issue whether living things are *in our day* evolved from inorganic matter. They dig up an ancient controversy among men of science as to the reality of certain alleged cases of "spontaneous generation," and quote Huxley and Tyndall and others against the claim. If they do not know that both Huxley and Tyndall claimed a natural origin for life on this planet, they are obviously unfit to write about the subject. Men of science are not agreed as to whether living things are in our time naturally evolved. Some, like Professor J. A. Thomson (who is emphatically opposed to materialism), believe that it is. The majority do not. But none of them admit that there is any inherent impossibility to prevent such evolution, or favour the idea that the first living forms must have been created.

On the second point, the nature of life, the clergy are just as deceptive. Here there is less agreement. Most biologists and physiologists regard the living thing as a "chemical machine," and "life" as a mere collective name for its functions. But there are some who consider the "vital principle" a

distinctive thing, and they are supported by other men of science who are not skilled in biology, but have religious views to defend. The clerical writers make a dazing confusion of this controversy, and convey that "sound science" is on their side. They pile up learned names, and their readers are totally unaware that men like Professors Bergson, Adickes, Dennert, or Whetham have no more authority on the scientific aspect of the matter than Mr. G. B. Shaw (who is an ardent Vitalist), or that Vitalists like Reinke, Driesch, and Bunge have not the least idea of supporting *their* view of the nature of life.

The clergy, in a word, are again pitching their tents on a slope which has been swept by many an avalanche. The ambition to show the purely mechanical or chemical nature of life has made very great progress in the last twenty years. It is still resisted by a minority of physiologists and biologists; a minority so small, however, that when Lord Kelvin made his famous profession of agreement with them some years ago Sir E. Ray Lankester retorted that this minority contained "no man of admitted leadership among modern biologists." Let us say that Vitalism has some distinguished supporters, usually religious men, who contest the opinion of the majority, which certainly gains ground. Even on this generous view of the situation, however, the position of the clerical writers is plainly a repetition of Victorian history. They are pinning their creed to one side in a scientific quarrel. We know what the result has usually been.

It is the same with the question of the evolution of man. To those who do not admit the evolution of man, or call it an "unproved speculation," one has nothing to say. If they prefer the authority of a preacher or a badly-informed clerical writer on such a subject to the unanimous teaching of scientific men, it is clearly no use arguing with them. They may continue in their taste, like the people one meets occasionally who believe that the earth is flat. There is no dispute in modern science about the evolution of man. Your Ballard or Gerard cannot here drag in even Sir Oliver Lodge or Professor Bergson to masquerade as "sound" anthropologists.

The usual subterfuge here is to distinguish severely between the evolution of the mind and the evolution of the body. The latter is, or may be, proved. The former we will not admit. Dr. Russel Wallace held this view. It is quite the general view of the semi-liberal middle class we are considering.

And it is one of the worst examples of a flagrant defiance of the teaching of science in the interest of religion. There is at least as much proof of the evolution of the human mind as there is of the evolution of the human body. Indeed, the massive evidence now collected in the science of prehistoric man proves the former more conclusively and impressively than the latter. Psychologists and anthropologists are agreed upon it. It is a part of the settled teaching of science, and there is not a modern authority who would admit that there is now the least room for doubt. Yet these

clerical writers, who assure their followers that the era of conflict is over, that science is no longer materialistic but quite harmonious with religion, on this point flagrantly defy the whole body of scientific teaching!

This very glaring defect of the harmony-of-science-and-religion school is usually concealed by diverting the issue. It is represented that the evolution of mind means the development of mind out of matter, and there is a rush of philosophers to express their horror at such a theory. That is not the issue. Was, or was not, the mind of man evolved from the mind of the ape-like beings who gave man his body? If so, it becomes, as we shall see, desperately hard to save the supposed privilege of immortality for man. It is so hard that the great majority of clerical writers even of this more liberal school refuse to admit the evolution. They thus take up a position of flat defiance to science, and all their rhetoric about reconciliation and moving henceforward in separate spheres is insincere verbosity.

This is so plain that what is understood to be a final and most advanced phase of Christian belief has emerged. I find it most ably expressed in Dr. R. Otto's *Naturalism and Religion*, which was translated by Professor J. A. Thomson and edited by the Rev. Dr. W. D. Morrison. Dr. Morrison does not commit himself to its contents, but I conclude, from other writings, that this is the one form of Christian belief of which religious scientific men like Professor Thomson, Principal Lloyd Morgan, Professor Geddes, etc., would, somewhat

remotely, approve. It is—apart from his spiritism and his rather tiresome re-interpretations of Christian doctrines—the religion of Sir O. Lodge, and was that of the late Dr. Wallace, Dr. Croll, and many others. It is willing to admit the eternity of the universe, and the evolution of life and mind. But it “informs the world with a soul,” as Dr. Otto says. It stoutly maintains that there is spirit as well as matter.

This is, as I said before, the last and thinnest shade of Christianity; theism associated with a more or less æsthetic esteem of Christ and the Christian morality. It is not new, because it is simply Unitarianism; and the history of theism and Unitarianism persuades us that it will never be much more than the religion of a refined and thoughtful minority. It is also very far from being a definite and consistent creed. Whether Dr. Otto (who is a distinguished professor of divinity at Göttingen) believes in personal immortality or no I cannot clearly determine. Professor Thomson and others do not, I understand. So in regard to God. Some grant him omnipotence, others benevolence; some practically reduce him to a pale intellectual energy diffused throughout the universe.

This is clearly not a religion for the mass, but it is a religious tendency that will increase. Christians cannot go on indefinitely gloating over rather foolish apologetic works in which divines of no scientific attainments pit themselves against the masters of science, and deny the evolution of life or mind. Another generation of clerical writers

will be swept away in the avalanche. Then thoughtful people will try this last form of religion, and will think that they are now really safe.

The title of this chapter means that I think otherwise, and it is necessary to show the grounds of that belief. I do not mean that no form of religion is conceivable which will not find itself in conflict with science. We shall see later that there are many attempts to base religious belief upon purely philosophical or transcendental arguments; that is to say, arguments which even in their starting-point transcend, or are quite apart from, the visible universe. Add to this philosophic theism a belief that Christian morality is the best for the world, and you get a more secure kind of Christianity. Moralists and sociologists may have a good deal to say on the latter part of it, but what I am taking here to mean science will have nothing to say.

Such a religion would gain security only by passing completely beyond the range of the mass of people. If in London to-day six million out of seven and a half million people do not attend church, one wonders what the proportion will be when people are invited to sing hymns to a Hegelian Absolute or pray to the deity of Professor Eucken, or even of Dr. Otto. Religion will then have become a branch of metaphysics, and men and women will probably prefer to put their trust in human effort. No, Christianity, or any religion that would influence masses of people, must not be transcendental. It must start from the visible. It must prove the existence of spirit by some

disturbance, arrangement, or behaviour of matter which cannot be explained without it.

And here is the germ of perpetual conflict. Tyndall said thirty years ago, on behalf of science : " We claim, and we will wrest from theology, the whole domain of cosmological theory." He might have said " the whole cosmos." Certainly to-day there is no aspect of any of the things which come within our experience that science has not the ambition to explain. Scientific men seem to be to-day more polite to the clergy. They do not thunder these defiant remarks from scientific platforms. They do not noisily *claim* the cosmos; they quietly take it. Theologians may roam over it and put their interpretations upon it. The man of science is indifferent. He goes his way. But we who look on perceive a very significant fact; *the two interpretations are opposed to each other, and always will be.*

This statement will seem to many a strained and wilful attempt to prolong strife. Not only divines, but a considerable number of men of science, have assured us that there is no longer any conflict. Many religious writers, and a few scientific men like Sir O. Lodge, go so far as to suggest that the cessation of conflict is due to some conversion on the part of science; that our masters of science are no longer " materialistic," as their Victorian predecessors were. I have on various occasions shown that this is quite unintelligibly false. Huxley and his Victorian colleagues resented and detested materialism, and hardly a single man of science of that generation can



honestly be described as a materialist; whereas if any man seriously suggests that modern science has abandoned the ideal which Huxley and Tyndall put forward—the ambition to reduce life to the rank of a chemical mechanism—he must be singularly ignorant of the aim and progress of recent physiology. Science is, if anything, considerably more materialistic than it was fifty years ago, and a far higher proportion of scientific men are heterodox in religion.

What men of science usually mean when they say that there is no longer a conflict of science and religion is that the clergy no longer raise biblical barriers against the advance of science. Even here they are wrong, as we have just seen. It is absurd to say that there is no conflict of science and Christianity when nine-tenths of the Christian controversial literature heatedly assails the evolution of life and the evolution of mind; I mean nine-tenths of the literature which is quite above the parochial or Victorian level. One can only suppose that, as I said, the real difference is that our men of science now disdainfully ignore the existence of this large Christian literature.

But even when we rise to the highest level of modern religious development it is quite untrue to say that there is no conflict; and of this I may give at once a very pointed illustration. Sir E. Ray Lankester and Professor J. A. Thomson are two distinguished biologists who have declared that there is no conflict, yet in their own persons they most conspicuously embody that permanent and profound conflict to which I am drawing

attention. Sir E. Ray Lankester is an Agnostic; Professor Thomson a theist. But the most passionate contention—if one may apply the word to so placid and refined a philosopher—of Professor Thomson on behalf of his religious views is one that Sir E. Ray Lankester not only heatedly rejects, but regards as deeply antagonistic to the essential aims of biological science. Professor Thomson stakes his faith upon the inability of science to put a mechanical interpretation upon life. Sir E. Ray Lankester is an emphatic opponent of Vitalism, and he has (in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, article “Zoology”) laid it down that it is “the aim or business of those occupied with biology to assign living things, in all their variety of form and activity, to the one set of forces recognised by the physicist and the chemist.” The antagonism is profound and deadly, and it is an antagonism of religion and science.

The man who wishes to penetrate beneath all the superficial and wordy stuff that is written about religion, and learn what are the deeper currents of religious thought, will find that amongst cultivated and thoughtful people there are to-day two main types of argument. One is the purely philosophic type, which we will consider later. The other, the more widely distributed, is that which I have illustrated from the words and writings of Professor Thomson. It consists essentially of a belief that science is unable, and will remain unable, to give a mechanical explanation of life—of the functions of an organism, the embryonic development, and the whole evolutionary

life-process—and concludes from this that there is an immaterial as well as a material world. In this argument, of course, the popular writers heartily concur, but let us keep for the moment to the small group of the intellectual elect of the religious world. The work of Dr. R. Otto, to which I have referred, has its principal foundation and inspiration in this argument. The better known work on behalf of religion by Professor James Ward, *Naturalism and Agnosticism*, proceeds largely on the same lines. Science is unable to explain certain phenomena of the order of experience; therefore we at that point reach the frontiers of the immaterial world. Spirit exists as well as matter.

Now this argument quite plainly prolongs the conflict of science and religion. Large numbers of the ablest physiologists of Europe and America are engaged, and have been engaged for decades, in realising the ideal which I have expressed in the words of Sir E. Ray Lankester. They would indignantly deny the statement of Professor Thomson that they have “not yet succeeded in giving a mechanical explanation of a single vital function.” I am not concerned here with the question which of them is right. I am concerned only to establish that there is a deadly, fundamental, and permanent conflict.

Professor Thomson would say that it is a scientific conflict, and he might remind me that in Germany certain physiologists who have no interest in religion share his view. Of that I am quite aware. But two further things are clear. First, the very

fact that men of science claim this discussion of the nature of life as their proper field—as it is—and that divines universally insist that the domain of life is an immaterial world prolongs the conflict of science and religion. Secondly, the fact that, as this very volume translated by Professor Thomson shows, all divines, and especially the more advanced and philosophical, attach great importance to the position which he holds, and base their case upon the defeat of what is called “the mechanical school,” makes this conflict of science and religion actual and acute. If the mechanicians win, theology moves on once more. It has no abiding habitation.

It is expedient to introduce even the general reader to these deeper currents of religious thought, because clerical writers who glibly accuse their critics of superficiality have so little appreciation of the real facts. As I said, there is a purely philosophic argument for religion about which science has nothing to say. We will examine it later. I need only observe here that, whether it is valid or no, it will never appeal to more than a small circle of cultivated minds. Not one clergyman in a hundred is competent even to understand it.

The fact is that in our own time, and leaving out of consideration the trashy literature of what I have called the Archæan level of religion, the case for theism and Christianity is universally stated in a form which provokes and sustains scientific attacks. It lives upon the things which “science cannot explain.” It insists that you

*must* admit the existence of God or the soul because this or that particular feature of things cannot be explained without them. The very men who disclaim the old practice of building on "gaps" do so throughout their works. Sir Oliver Lodge, for instance, in his address to the British Association a few years ago (*Continuity*), urged believers not to follow the blundering old argument for God, yet in that very address he makes numerous appeals to things which science "cannot explain." The entire apologetic of all his works is that there are features or movements of the visible world which we cannot explain without postulating God and spirits. As very few men of science agree with him, it is singular that he continues to assure people that there is no conflict between science and religion.

Take, again, the Gifford lectures of Mr. Balfour (*Theism and Humanism*, 1915). The argument of these is threefold. Mr. Balfour proves the existence of God from the sense of beauty, from the moral sense or conscience, and from our belief in a material universe. This is precisely the old type of argument. Science cannot explain either the origin or the validity of the æsthetic and moral sentiments, therefore we discern in them the operation of God. Not only does this provoke and sustain conflict with science, but in large part the very things on which Mr. Balfour builds have been amply explained by science, as we shall see later. The more famous work of Professor J. Ward, *Naturalism and Agnosticism*, is similarly vitiated from end to end by a defiance of scientific

opinion; a plea that science must leave features or realms of nature to the theologian because it cannot explain them.

As to the popular apologetic literature which still pours out from the religious press, and the arguments which still flow sonorously from the pulpit, the reader will be quite aware that these are entirely and always based upon the inability of science to explain something or other. The beauty and order of the universe, the phenomena of conscience, the direction of civilisation, the pattern of a butterfly's wings, the regularity of the crystal, the functions of living matter, consciousness, idealism—the whole comprehensive plea for the foundations of religion is based upon the supposed inability of science to explain these things. Evolution may be admitted, but it has limits, and it needs to be "directed." Myriads of preachers and writers who hardly know what evolution means, and who (to judge by the ancient authorities they quote in the footnotes of their works) have not the slightest idea what science has or has not explained at the time they write, discourse with the greatest fluency and emphasis on the things which science cannot explain. The whole case for religion is based upon the incompleteness of science to-day, and is at the mercy of the science of to-morrow.

The result is that we still contemplate the steady march of theologians—toward the rear. Once it was the wonderful order of our solar system which captivated them. Now astronomy has explained it, and only a Bishop of London who

cannot be expected to have leisure to study these things continues to find Providence in atmospheres and planetary orbits. Then it was the wonderful nature of the atoms of matter; obviously "manufactured articles," one of the Victorian religious scientists said. Less than twenty years ago clergymen with a smattering of physics were writing books about the inability of science to explain the atoms. The ground again slid from beneath them. The discovery of radium afforded us at least a satisfactory glimpse of the explanation. *Then*, to our amazement, clerical writers on all sides assured their hearers that materialism had received its death-blow at the hand of science, because the atoms had been resolved into ether!

On the biological and anthropological side, we have seen, the position of clerical writers is even worse. The evolution of the human body is denied in works of the highest ecclesiastical credit; the evolution of life and of the human mind are questioned or flatly rejected in ninety-nine out of every hundred of recent religious works. What can men and women make of the prestige and educational value of the clergy when they sustain this attitude, on a subject on which they have no training or equipment, in face of the unanimous and absolutely decisive conviction of the scientific authorities? Surely it is not too much to say that their intellectual credit is gone. They are, on this side, bankrupt. They have learned no lesson from the past, and they court certain disaster in the future.

One or two further observations must be made

before I conclude. While some religious writers falsely represent, generally by quoting ancient authorities without saying that they are ancient, that men of science are not agreed on these points, others daze their readers by telling them that evolution is not an "explanation," or that the task of science is to "describe," not to "explain." This is nonsense. All explanation is description. You explain a complex phenomenon when you describe the elements which constitute it and the way in which they constitute it. You explain a fact—the appearance of a new star or an Ice-Age—when you describe or suggest the processes which preceded it.

As to evolution being "a mere process," it is forgotten that the precise task of modern research is to substitute antecedent processes for imaginary causes. If you ask why the first mammal or bird appeared, science will show you how a certain group of Permian reptiles had an organisation which might evolve into that of the mammal or the bird, and how these reptiles were, in point of undeniable fact, exposed to the searching selection of a prolonged Ice-Age. If you suggest that Providence acted indirectly, in causing the Ice-Age, the geologist will prove that certain changes then occurred (rise of mountains, etc.) which caused the Ice-Age. Providence is, in other words, expelled gradually from the whole record. If you say that at least a Creator set the whole chain of processes going, you assume, without warrant, that there was a beginning of the series; of which science has no evidence, nor has philosophy.



And this suggests a further consideration. What proportion of men of science are in any sense religious to-day we do not know. I have known distinguished professors of great universities, even in our day, to say that it is not safe for them to declare their opinions. I have in the colonies seen mean and malicious attacks upon the position of professors who expressed polite criticism of religion. But the fact that very earnest efforts have been made of late years to induce men of science and letters to profess religious belief (which is quite safe), and that only a small minority have given even a vague profession of religious belief, is not without significance. In the case of men of science there is a very clear reason for bias against religion. It is simply that what are called religious explanations are not, in the scientific sense, explanations at all. To say that science cannot explain embryonic development, and therefore an immaterial force is at work, is merely to put an unknown instead of an unknown; a word instead of a comprehensive reality. We have made progress, the man of science says, precisely because we outgrew that evil habit. We found out the nature of water when we refused to explain its properties by "aquosity." We are finding the nature of life by refusing to believe in "vitality." Perhaps we shall make more progress in the interpretation of consciousness when we refuse to believe in "spirituality." It excites the disdain of scientific men to hear parsons tell the uneducated that science does not "explain" things, and then give these simple folk a few incomprehensible names ("spirit," etc.)

as real explanations. The method of science, as well as its ambition, is antagonistic to theology.

Finally, a word in regard to this ambition of science, to which I have frequently referred. It is the ideal expressed by Tyndall in his Belfast Address. Science is going to explain the universe. To talk, as some do, of "mechanical" science as a special and pernicious sort of science is absurd. All science is mechanical. Science ceases when quantitative formulæ fail. Scientific men express no opinion as to whether the whole contents of the universe will or will not be amenable to mechanical formulæ. They go on extending them from day to day. Where they fail, the student of science does not drop on to his knees and say "Spirit." He leaves the problem for a later and wiser generation. Newton inferred the existence of spirit when he found that his formulæ would not quite cover the solar system. He was wrong. Clerk-Maxwell did the same when he could not explain the properties of atoms. He was wrong. The man of science has learned patience. He has only just begun the serious study of the universe.

But his network of research is spreading rapidly. He undertook the study of languages, and the legend of Babel vanished. He set to work on disease and lunacy, and the devil disappeared. Now there is a science of the moral sentiments (*ethics*), a science of the sentiment of beauty (*æsthetics*), a science of comparative mythology, a science of mind, a science of history, a science of economics, a science of sociology. And as each of these expands and deepens and illumines its sub-

ject, some theological argument disappears. Paley and his proof of God from nature, Newman and his proof of God from conscience, Balfour and his proof of God from the sense of beauty, are ancient monuments standing out in a field over which the flood of advancing science now spreads. The smaller men of to-day do not know that the tide is already up to their waists. The larger men of to-day are anxious.

They do not see, but the vast mass of thoughtful people outside the Churches see plainly enough. Long before the war they saw that the prestige of the clergy was shattered. I have so far confined myself to one thread of the story. It remains to see how, simultancously, the tide of the new history was rolling in upon the old religious field; the philosophers—the spiritual-culture men—were standing aloof or undermining the old defences; the fiery zeal of the new demoeraey was discovering the long alliance with corruption and the moral and social futility of the Churches.

## SECTION II

### THE VERDICT OF HISTORY

#### CHAPTER I

##### THE RISE OF PROFANE HISTORY

THE preceding section may have confirmed in many minds the impression that what is called "science" is the outstanding opponent of Christianity. Perhaps this section will convince the reader that the character must rather be assigned to "history." Shrewd as have been the blows which scientific men rained upon the structure of religious tradition in the nineteenth century, grave as is the actual defiance of established scientific truth by the great majority of believers, the situation seems to be even worse in regard to what I am, in a broad sense, calling history. The blows it has dealt traditional religion are deeper and more exhausting than those inflicted by science, and there is to-day the same flagrant and general defiance of historical truth as we found in the case of science.

The distinction between these two great branches of modern culture is not so marked as is generally supposed. Science is the application of systematic and accurate methods of research to the contents of the universe; the contents of experience, some

would say. As I said, the ambition of science is to express things in quantitative formulæ. But this, as we saw, becomes increasingly difficult when you leave the inorganic world and ascend the scale of life. The religious writer or philosopher draws from this the conclusion that when we pass to the consideration of living things we enter an immaterial world, which, from its very nature, we will never express in quantitative or mechanical formulæ. The man of science knows that the most obvious difference between the inorganic and the organic is one of complexity of structure, and this is enough to cause greater obscurity. The simplest bit of living plasm is an extraordinary material complexity; the brain of a higher animal is a stupendously complex structure. We therefore suspect that it is this minute and extraordinary complexity, not the presence of some unintelligible "spirit," which baffles and retards research, and we will allow a few centuries for research, if need be, before expressing an opinion. Nothing like that period may be needed, for the scientific grasp of life has already proceeded in physiology to a point of which religious writers seem to have no conception; and the whole of our experience confirms the belief that we have but to unravel a great material complexity to master life.

Meantime the branches of research which deal with the higher or more complex living things, especially man, cannot have the same character as those which deal with stars or rocks or plants. Yet they are a continuation of the same systematic and accurate research. History is the science of

human activity in the past. That it is just a continuation of science is easily seen from its position. We give the name of "Paleontology," which was formerly a branch of Geology, to the study of ancient life on the earth. When we reach the human level we call it "Prehistoric Archaeology or Anthropology," or "Prehistoric Science"; the French sometimes call it simply "Pre-History" (*Le Préhistorique*). It is undoubtedly a science. History is merely the continuation of this research into past life on the earth. It shades gradually out of Prehistoric Science, at the vague point where man becomes "civilised."

The field of research is so vast that it is divided between several sciences. Philology takes languages; ethnology takes living peoples and races; archaeology takes monuments; mythology takes religions. History proper is usually understood to be the study of the past of the human race, since it crossed the threshold of civilisation, by means of written documents. It is not to-day confined to written documents, and I take it in a broad sense. It is the study of the human past in the light of written documents, monuments, or surviving stages (in religions, for instance) of earlier culture.

As such it entered earlier than what is narrowly called science into conflict with Christianity, and it is in deadly conflict to-day with nine-tenths, or more, of the prevailing belief. That is the theme of the present section. Christianity gave the world a version of the early history of man, as well as of pre-history and the origin of the world. History found this version just as inaccurate as science

found it. Christianity, in particular, gave the world a version of the development of religion and morality, which was very flattering to itself. History has proved that this version is monstrously inaccurate. Christianity, in recent times, has sought to regain its lost prestige by spreading a version of the history of Europe which gives great social importance to itself. This in turn is monstrously inaccurate. The clergy have been found out. Their credit is deeply shaken.

In this chapter I give such brief description of the beginning of the conflict as the limits of this work permit in each section. There has for some centuries been a practice of distinguishing between sacred and "profane" history. The distinction is due partly to laymen and partly to priests. In the earlier Middle Ages all history was sacred, because letters were almost confined to clerics or "clerks" (as the surviving use of the latter word for men who write reminds us). These clerics naturally used what they called history—a weird and uncritical hash of facts and legends—in the interest of piety and the Church. In the later Middle Ages, when laymen won the right of culture and research, some turned to history. They found it easier to profess that they would not meddle with "sacred" history, and the clergy, keeping a vigilant eye on them, permitted them to write works of "profane" history.

During the period which is called the Renaissance, or Re-Birth of Letters, in the fifteenth century, these laymen or liberal clerics (it still paid to take orders as a matter of form) became bolder. I cannot here enlarge upon the causes of the Renais-

sance. In my opinion the influence of the introduction, or increased introduction, of Greek letters from Constantinople has been somewhat exaggerated, but in the respect which here concerns us it was undoubtedly great. Constantinople fell to the Turks (1453), and the Greek scholars, who had, but made little sound use of, the ancient Greek literature, fled to Italy. A zeal for Roman and Greek literature spread over Italy, and slowly over Europe. Scholars were deeply moved when, amidst the barbarism of Christian Europe, they contemplated these relics of the two splendid civilisations which had been contemptuously referred to for centuries as "paganism." Scepticism spread throughout the world of letters, and men who denied the immortality of the soul or openly used pagan language were patronised by Popes.

The Papacy had at this time entered upon a period of deep corruption.<sup>1</sup> Rome was a city of extraordinary licence. The Popes had, however, a keen eye to the interest of the Church, and the new scholars had to restrict themselves to learned eulogies of paganism which did not reach the crowd. But there had been an anti-Papal movement in Europe for centuries, and some of the scholars took advantage of it to win a measure of liberty. In that age critical history was born; and I should date its birth with the publication in 1439 of Lorenzo Valla's "Declamation" against a forged Papal document known as "The Donation of Constantine."

<sup>1</sup> I have given a short description, from the original documents, in the *R.P.A. Annual* for 1917.



Lorenzo Valla was one of the free and cultured spirits of the time who took holy orders rather as a profession or means of advancement. This sceptical priest was one of the great masters and most passionate admirers of Latin literature. He openly advocated the Epicurean philosophy of life, and he looked with profound disdain on the priests about him who practised that philosophy, yet professed the ascetic creed of the Galilean. The Papacy was the centre of this corrupt system, and Valla examined the bases of its claims. He discovered that those bases were not so much an ingenious interpretation of texts of Scripture as a series of deliberate and amazing forgeries. Canons (decisions) of early Councils, letters of Popes and bishops, lives of saints, rescripts of kings and emperors, incidents of history, had been altered or concocted to an extraordinary extent in order to prove the supreme power of the Papacy.

One of the most notable of these forgeries was the document known as "The Donation of Constantine." The first Christian (or more or less Christian) Emperor of Rome, Constantine, was, after murdering his wife and son, moved to quit Rome, and found an eastern Empire at Constantinople. In the eighth century, when the Popes began, in an age of profound ignorance, to claim temporal sovereignty, two documents were deliberately forged, apparently by Papal clerks, which represented that, in leaving Rome, Constantine had handed over to the Popes the control of the western Empire (the greater part of Europe). One document was "The Acts of Saint Silvester" (the Pope

of the time), the other the supposed deed drawn up by the Emperor, "The Donation of Constantine." I will show in a later chapter that great numbers of forgeries, of a less serious nature, had preceded these, and a vast number of forgeries and alterations of documents followed and completed the design of the Popes.

Valla looked into these clumsy forgeries, as many of them were, and, in spite of the danger of the times, he denounced "The Donation." He was, of course, persecuted, but he had powerful protectors, and he went on to attack various other forgeries which were embedded in the Canon Law or the Papal version of history. In this Lorenzo Valla had the distinction of inaugurating the science of history.

It is not my purpose to follow the development in detail. The Italian writers of the Renaissance rendered great service by the generally sceptical tone of their works and their slighting of miracles and legends. The chief historian amongst them, Guicciardini, though one of the least heterodox, very plainly attacked miracles. Most of them, however, were purely literary men or philosophers, and their main service was to vindicate the honour of ancient Greece and Rome against the calumny of ages of dense ignorance; on the other hand, the literary men and poets spread throughout Europe a caustic treatment of the corruption of the monastic orders, the clergy, and the Papal Court.

The Reformation partly checked and partly aided the development. It severely checked the growing enthusiasm for "paganism." The Re-

formers made this Italian "vice" a fundamental part of their indictment, and the Papacy had to include the suppression of this literature amongst the reforms which were imposed upon it. Hence the elegant literature of the Italian Renaissance, like the glorious art which had flourished in the period of scepticism and licence, came to a close, and the blight of Austrian rule and a reformed Papacy fell upon the country. In Protestant lands humanism was as severely checked, but the critical study of Papal literature was, naturally, encouraged.

The Renaissance had, however, now spread to France and England, and, besides the critical scrutiny of Papal documents for controversial purposes, a deeper current slowly set in. I need recall only the chief monuments: Montaigne's *Essays* (1580-8), Lord Herbert's *De Veritate* (1624), Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1651), Spinoza's *Tractatus* (1670), Bayle's *Dictionary* (1696). Literature which might, in parts, be classed as critical history now multiplied rapidly, and it is useless to give names. Protestantism begat Unitarianism; Unitarianism led to Deism; and Deism already begat here and there a deeper heresy. A comprehensive attack upon "revealed religion" developed in Europe.

This attack was partly philosophical, which we consider later, and partly a criticism of the Scriptures. In the latter the great historical assault upon Christianity began. Atheism was not unrepresented in the seventeenth century, and was powerfully represented in France before the end of the eighteenth century, but the prevailing form of scepticism was Deism: a belief in God and the

immortality of the soul associated with a drastic hostility to the Scriptures and the Christian Churches. Although this "natural religion" began in France, it was early transplanted to England by Lord Herbert, our ambassador at Paris, and then there opened in England a long and fierce attack upon the Bible which in its turn inspired Voltaire and the French critics.

The struggle is recorded in some detail in Mr. J. M. Robertson's *Short History of Freethought* (Vol. II), and cannot even be summarised here. It is enough to say that from the middle of the seventeenth to the middle of the eighteenth century a brilliant series of English Freethinkers assailed the Bible. It was this effective assault that first lowered the prestige of the clergy and prepared the way for the later scientific assault. There was still no historical science, in our sense of the word. The methods by which the date and authority of the various books of the Bible are tested to-day were unknown. Criticism was directed to the extravagance and occasional inconsistency of the stories contained in the Bible, as the well-known work of Voltaire illustrates.

There is a tendency in our time to belittle this phase of Deistic criticism, or declare it only of historical interest. But as long as millions of our people literally accept the ages and amours of the patriarchs—as long as the most authoritative publications of the Church of Rome insist that a Flood did literally destroy the whole human race, and that our race issued from a human pair directly created by God—the satirical criticism of these legends

has a legitimate place in life. It is difficult to discuss them with courtesy and patience, and it seems that the sense of humour is the most efficient antidote to that narcotic influence by which the Churches induce even educated people still to persuade themselves that they believe these old fragments of primitive folk-lore.

How this critical study of the Bible gradually assumed a scientific form in the second half of the eighteenth century will be told in the next chapter. First let us see how the broad historical criticism of Christianity flowed gradually into distinct and more powerful streams. It was still an age when men could have an almost encyclopædic command of such knowledge as existed, and the criticism of Christianity was a confused shower of satires and unsystematic reflections. With the growth of knowledge specialism increased. The physical sciences, we saw, began their separate attacks upon the traditional acceptance of the Bible. Philosophy passed into the hands of learned specialists. Biblical criticism became a distinct and dangerous branch of theology. History was a branch of culture that demanded a man's whole life. The germs of a science of comparative religion appeared.

The anti-clerical movement had now become international. As the Deistic movement waned in England, an even more vehement and effective school arose in France, where the brilliant and learned works of Montesquieu, Voltaire, Rousseau, Diderot, La Mettrie, D'Alembert, Helvétius, D'Holbach, and a host of less-known men, created a ferment of hostility to Christianity throughout the

middle and titled classes. Through the mediation of Frederick the Great this ferment spread to Germany, where liberal clergymen like Semler and Lessing assisted in undermining the literal acceptance of the Bible and of miracles, and preparing the way for the weighty sceptical influence of Goethe and Schiller. The middle-class of other countries partly shared the agitation, and Voltaire's caustic writings travelled over Europe. In 1773 this international anti-clerical movement won the great triumph of forcing the Papacy to suppress the formidable Society of Jesus and endorse the charges against it.

Some years before a young English scholar, Edward Gibbon, had conceived, at Rome, the design of writing a monumental historical work, in which, on the pretext of describing the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, he would relate accurately the early history of Christianity. Gibbon's great work, which was completed in 1787, inaugurated the modern era of history. Its rich and graceful composition, its magnificent breadth of conception, and its (for the time) portentous research gave it an immediate and weighty influence. Although Gibbon's scarcely veiled disdain of Christianity was bitterly resented, the famous chapters on the rise and progress of Christianity (XV and XVI) are too generous. Gibbon overestimates the progress that Christianity had made before it obtained political power; he is not sufficiently critical about the persecutions of Christians by the Romans; and he is altogether inadequate in relating by what means the new religion was finally enforced upon Europe

and the moral degradation which—from whatever cause—followed. He was, as Hume told him, “prudent”; as nine men in ten would have been in that intolerant age. But his work superbly opened the new historical period which would, in the course of the nineteenth century, unveil the true record of Christianity in Europe. A new enemy was in the field.

The French Revolution, as I said, checked this development of middle-class scepticism, but opened the even more disastrous period of democratic scepticism. The royalist and religious reaction after 1815, and the perception by middle-class Free-thinkers that a new political force was stirring its chains, gave some respite to the clergy. But coercion proved useless in the larger countries. Already men like Thomas Paine had translated the Deistic criticisms of the Bible and the clergy into a language which the people could understand, and the slow growth of elementary education opened an increasing number of willing ears to the indictment of the Churches. The close alliance of the clergy with the anti-democratic forces after the fall of Napoleon only made more effective the anti-clerical gospel.

At this period, we saw, the conflict of science and Christianity seriously opened. Simultaneously the historians and the biblical critics pressed their attacks; while men of great popular influence like Robert Owen and his “social missionaries” conveyed the conclusions of the learned to the mass of the people. As the Victorian age developed, a brilliant group of historians fought side by side with

the representatives of science. Grote, Buckle, and Lecky; Renan, Michelet, and Comte; Mommsen, Niebuhr, and Von Ranke—each, according to his degree of heterodoxy, did his part in clearing the true record of European development of its rich overgrowth of legends. At the same time antiquarian research became a science of archæology, and the true features of the old civilisations of Egypt and Babylonia, Greece and Rome, were redeemed from Christian calumny.

In the footsteps of these masters of history followed the plodding workers of the modern science, and there was a comprehensive and constant exposure of myths. Protestants eagerly lent their aid in a large section of the process, since the results told heavily against the Church of Rome. The work of Valla, in denouncing the priestly forgeries on which the power of Rome was based and the legendary lives of saints and martyrs whom Protestants did not venerate, proceeded rapidly. Immense numbers of critical inquiries, based upon the original historical documents, were issued in Germany and England; and French and Italian writers contributed as Rationalism spread in those countries. The Protestant was, as a rule, quite prepared to belittle the Middle Ages. Europe had then been ruled entirely by the Papacy, which he detested, and every fresh proof of the demoralisation of Europe and the corrupt procedure of the Papacy itself was a fresh justification of the Reformation. Historians like Döllinger drew up a formidable indictment of the intrigues, equivocations, forgeries, and other corrupt devices by which the Papacy



had secured its power, and the very evil use it had made of that power when it was obtained. Catholic historians corrected the occasional excesses of their Protestant opponents, and in turn brought to light the less spiritual side of the Reformation.

History gained by this controversial struggle, in spite of the exaggerations on both sides; and what history gained in the way of truth Christianity lost in the way of prestige. The story of Europe since the establishment of Christianity began to wear a very human aspect, and the kind of humanity it represented was not elevated. The general belief, that a wise and merciful Providence had selected Europe as a special theatre of its vigilance and benevolence, was shattered. The claim of the clergy, that they had been the useful instruments of Providence in the creation of this unique civilisation of Europe, was shown to rest on their own utterly inaccurate version of history.

But, like every other branch of culture, history rapidly passed from being merely "secular" to being largely Rationalistic. The lay historian quietly gathered the fragments of unpleasant truth which Protestant and Catholic controversialists flung at each other and made of them a connected story. He then extended this process of purification to the entire record of the Christian religion. Protestants like Lord Bryce and Dean Milman and Leopold von Ranke could afford to indulge in the moral luxury of complete candour when they ventured to describe Europe as it was under the exclusive control of Rome. They did not apply the same critical spirit to the investigation of the

first four centuries. The grossness of the "dark ages," the corruption of the clergy and monks and nuns, the horrors of the Inquisition, the brutality of massacres of Albigensians and French Protestants, the appalling trade in spurious relics, the record of the confessional, the vices and crimes of the bad Popes, the unscrupulous power-seeking of many of the good Popes—to expose these things meant to exalt Protestant above Roman Christianity; but it was quite another matter to lay a sacrilegious hand upon the miraculous history of early Christianity.

This was what the new historians did. They soon found that the pious forgeries by which the Papacy had fabricated an historical basis for its claims and ambitions were not without precedent. In the earliest Christian ages in Europe there had been an enormous amount of pious story-telling. Just as relics had been invented for saints, so saints and martyrs had been invented for the enrichment of the calendar and the decoration of the Church. The literature of the Church of Rome to-day is a more or less expurgated edition of its earlier literature. Two centuries of historical criticism have pressed upon the Vatican and induced it to purge some of the more eccentric of its legends of early Christianity. Yet the official literature is to-day an amazing tissue of early forgeries. The lives of the saints which are contained in the "Breviary," a large part of which every priest in the world must read every day, swarm with demonstrable untruths and fictions about the early saints, some of whom are entirely legendary. Between the fifth and the eighth centuries, it is now known, "acts of

the martyrs" were unblushingly fabricated on a colossal scale; in order to give the early record of the Church in Europe that element of the miraculous and of unique moral splendour which would command the allegiance of later ages. Scores of these pious forgeries linger in the official "Breviary" of the Roman Church, after being expelled from "profane" history. I will give examples in a later chapter.

The real extent of the persecution of the Christians by the Roman authorities was slowly determined, and one of the most popular arguments for the divine origin of Christianity was undermined. The Church had made, not a miraculous progress, but comparatively little progress, in Europe during the first three centuries of its existence. The rivals of Christianity in the Roman Empire were then seriously studied, and it was found that these other eastern religions, though quite as austere in their ideals as Christianity, had made as much progress as—in some cases probably more progress than—Christianity. We began to get a truthful and intelligible picture of the Græco-Roman world as a cosmopolitan mixture, a great "melting-pot," in which several international religions, often much alike in ritual and ideals, struggled for mastery. In fine, another group of historians devoted themselves to the actual problem of the "triumph" of Christianity, and divested this also of the last shreds of its tinsel of miracle and spirituality. The "miracle" of Constantine's conversion was easily dissolved—though, as I said previously, it seems still to be taught to ministers in important modern Wesleyan colleges—the records of his successors

were scanned, the decrees by which the Emperors were induced to suppress the old Roman religion by violence and establish Christianity in its place were brought to light.

With these discoveries one of the most popular arguments of preachers against the Deists and other heretics was robbed of all its force. At what I have called the Archæan level of our religious world the argument is still popular. More than one reader will have heard or read the eloquent plea that Christianity differs so singularly from all other religions in its spread and triumph that we must admit that a supernatural power guided and aided it. This argument is sheer historical nonsense; it is based upon historical statements which have long been discredited. The whole record is quite natural and human.

At that point history, properly so called, ceases, but what I am calling history in the broader sense takes up the task. Profane historians have, conveniently for the Church, very rarely taken the problem of Christ and the early appearance of Christianity as proper and legitimate subjects of their research. The result is that this particular section of history is one of the most obscure and controverted in the whole record, having regard to the number of contemporary documents. The divines, however, in whose hands this section of the human chronicle was left, felt the pressure of the age, and there grew up amongst them what is called the science of biblical criticism. This analysis of the documents on which Christianity was based has again dissolved into mythic or legendary fiction much that was, and in a very large

part of the Christian world still is, regarded as the most precious and indispensable elements of the Christian belief.

Nor did the work of history, in the broader sense, end here. There arose a science of comparative religions or mythologies which has had a very great importance in settling the true position of Christianity. It found in other religions, especially in the eastern religions which preceded or were contemporaries of Christianity, doctrines and legends so similar to what had been preached as the unique features of Christianity and its founder that, even where borrowing could not be proved, the Christian tradition fell to the humble position of one among several natural developments of man's religious sense and mythic faculty. All the religions of the world were gathered into a comprehensive evolutionary scheme, and it was found that Christianity occupied a quite natural and easily understood place in this scheme. It was one of the later blossoms of a tree the roots of which could be traced down to the obscure and not very creditable depths of the savage consciousness.

Hence the design of this section of my task. In three separate chapters I must describe the results of biblical criticism, of the science of comparative religion, and of history proper in so far as it corrects the legendary traditions of ecclesiastical literature. The reader who is unfamiliar with these matters, whose reading may hitherto have been restricted to the kind of clerical literature of which we saw specimens in the last chapter, will then decide for himself whether the general and grave statement I have outlined in this chapter is or is not justified.

## CHAPTER II

### THE FATE OF THE BIBLE

THE immediate source of biblical criticism may, as I said, be found in the large and acute literature of the English Deists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. A severe historical inquiry would, of course, greatly qualify this statement. On the one hand, this kind of criticism was not new. Unitarianism (or Socinianism) was almost as old as Protestantism, and its learned defenders naturally examined with critical eye those passages of the New Testament on which the divines of the larger Churches based their belief in the divinity of Christ and their claim of a sacerdotal mission. Judaism was as old as Christianity itself, and the first measure of comparative freedom had emboldened Jewish writers to expose the weaknesses of the Gospel narrative. In fine, at the Renaissance, and even earlier—for there was much scepticism in Italy as early as the time of Dante—the miracles and incredibilities of the Scriptures had been assailed. Scepticism is not a modern virtue. It has merely grown with the growth of knowledge and freedom.

On the other hand, the kind of criticism which these earlier sceptics conducted did not directly lead to the modern science, or to what is called

the Higher Criticism. It pointed out contradictions in the Bible, but its chief aim was to ridicule miraculous and other statements which seemed to the critics obviously untrue. This kind of criticism has a limited use. To one man the story of Jonah or of the Gadarene swine seems so palpably absurd that it has but to be presented to him in a satirical light. But the hypnotic influence of the religious education is such that until modern times even highly cultivated men professed that they found no difficulty in accepting such legends. The strength of the modern criticism is that it is scientific. It finds indications in the documents themselves that they were not written by the author to whom they are attributed, but so much later than the events described that they cease to have authority. It is in this sense that the Bible has been studied, and every book in it which makes statements of any dogmatic importance has issued from the trial with its authority shaken or destroyed.

The process began, naturally, with the Penta-teuch. In 1753 an orthodox French physician named Jean Astruc published a little book which he called "Conjectures on the original memoirs which Moses seems to have used in composing the book of *Genesis*." Astruc believed, apparently, that Moses was the author, and he seems to have felt that he would enhance the value of the book if he could show that, in describing remote events, Moses had been able to use older authorities. He discovered the now well-known fact that in the Hebrew text of *Genesis* two different names for God (Jahveh and Elohim) are used in such fashion

as to suggest two different writers, each of whom has his characteristic language. In spite of the common statement that biblical critics are "always changing" or contradicting each other, this simple yet fruitful discovery has become a permanent element of historical science. It is now quite the common teaching of divines that the separate writings of a "Jahvist" and an "Elohist" have been combined in *Genesis*.

Little notice was taken at the time of Astruc's "Conjectures," and the criticism of the Bible proceeded on the old unscientific lines. The Deistic attack died down in England, and was in France lost amidst the confusion of the Revolution and the Restoration. The theme was, however, taken up in Germany, and in the hands of the methodical and laborious divines of that country it quickly assumed a scientific form. Reimarus introduced into Germany the Deistic attack upon miracles, and, as he was afraid to publish his scattered papers, the well-known literary man Lessing published them after his death. The learned theologian Semler, who had himself penned some more moderate criticism of the Old Testament, heatedly attacked these "Wolfenbüttel Fragments," as they were called, and wide attention was drawn to the subject.

The German clergy were, however, advancing. Men of science and letters like Goethe and Humboldt, philosophers like Immanuel Kant, were profoundly influencing the new culture of the country, and causing the Churches grave concern. Frederick the Great had already set Prussia an



example of profound scepticism; and earlier German thinkers, like Leibnitz, had speculated with considerable independence of the Lutheran and Calvinistic Churches. Scepticism of one kind or other grew throughout the eighteenth century, and the frank and comprehensive antagonism of the great Goethe to Christianity enormously widened the circle. Even people who were unfamiliar with his stinging epigrams learned to laugh at Satan in the person of Mephistopheles and enjoy the irony of the opening scene of *Faust*.

With all recognition of the courage and scholarship with which divines have for more than a hundred years conducted the criticism of the Bible, we must remember that they have throughout acted under pressure and in the interest of religion. When those who are unfamiliar with these matters learn that the "Higher Critics," the men who have shattered the old idea of the Bible for any educated person, have been and are, not sceptical laymen, but professional theologians, they either declaim against the "treachery" of ministers of the Gospel or ask us to admire their courage and honesty. We may without hesitation admire the courage and love of truth of many of these divines, but it is not ungracious to point out the circumstances. By the end of the eighteenth century the educated world had been wrought to such a pitch of hostility to the Bible, as it was popularly conceived, that enlightened divines were compelled to plan a new defence of it. In doing this, it must be added, their candour has, as we shall see, had its limitations.

It was plain from the first that a new defence must not attempt to vindicate the absolute truth of all the remarkable contents of the Bible. Much would have to be surrendered to non-inspired and anonymous writers, whose authority would prove very parlous. Astruc's hypothesis was revived and further developed, especially by Eichhorn. The existence of myths, legends, and much naive ancient literature in the Old Testament was recognised by an increasing number of theologians. It is no part of my plan to write a chronicle of these things. The history of biblical criticism may be read in a hundred modern books. My purpose is rather to point out the influence of the general mental environment on theological thought, the concessions that were gradually wrung from some, the obstinacy of others in face of established facts, the successive diminution of clerical authority.

At the time when Paulus, Eichhorn, De Wette, and other divines were laying the foundations of the modern science of the Bible, the atmosphere was, as we saw, particularly stimulating. The democratic movement had begun to add its menace to that of middle-class scepticism. Science was beginning its destructive work, and the geologists were casting grave doubt upon some of the characteristic legends of *Genesis*. Properly instructed people could no longer believe that the world had been created in six days, about six thousand years before, and that a great flood had at a much later date destroyed the whole of the human race. Men were studying the monuments of ancient

Egypt, and it was felt that the existence of the pyramids alone, which showed a great civilisation fully developed before the supposed time of the flood, belied the narrative of *Genesis*. That narrative began to wear the aspect of a dreamy and extravagant folk-lore, such as we find commonly in nations which have risen from barbarism to civilisation, or still linger in barbarism.

It was to meet the difficulties of the intellectual class, the men of the new universities of Germany, that Schleiermacher set out to liberalise Christianity, and Paulus and Eichhorn began to find a new meaning in *Genesis*. It is significant that when the Berlin University was founded in 1810 three of these liberal divines were appointed to the staff. Christianity was to be liberalised, or else it would cease to hold the intellectual. The long story of the Higher Criticism, the long struggle of liberal and illiberal divines, opened. Science and history meantime made steady progress, and the concessions of one decade had to be doubled by the concessions of the next. I am concerned with the results, not with the various theories which were successively tried or the men who were engaged in the work.

Here we have a situation which differs materially from that we studied in the last section, and it is important to appreciate the difference. The ordinary man or woman, who has not leisure to make a complete study of such questions, must be largely influenced by authority. The modern ideal is to substitute as far as possible a personal and reasoned conviction for a belief founded on

authority. This is particularly urgent in matters of religion, where all the ecclesiastical authorities in Europe have flagrantly misled their followers for centuries. But the vast range of modern culture sets limits to the ideal, and a man of little leisure must make a common-sense use of authority. Everybody does rely on authority in some matters. The ablest physicist must accept the authority of his astronomical or biological colleagues as to matters within their spheres. When the authorities are united one is quite safe. The Protestant who insists, on the authority of a very poorly educated parson or religious writer, that man was directly created, not evolved, is merely making a ridiculous and disastrous use of authority. The Catholic who imagines that the word of Father Wasmann or Father Muckermann is more valuable than the united conviction of all the proper scientific authorities is just as ridiculous. That was the strength of our case in the last section.

In the present instance we have no united science to oppose to the traditional religious belief. The study of the Bible has been for the most part left to divines, and divines are never united on any subject. There are scholarly and unscholarly divines; candid and the reverse of candid. Their bias is always in favour of tradition and official teaching. Progress is wrung from them in the shape of concessions. They do not like to disturb "the people." They know that every advance they make reflects upon the errors of their predecessors, and lowers the old clerical prestige. So we find them divided and distracted. Some,

we saw, would defy modern culture altogether; and between these and the most advanced you have every degree of hesitation and concession. Even if we confine ourselves to the more learned—and the ease with which people listen to the assurances on these complicated matters of the average, badly educated preacher is to me a psychological mystery—we still have very considerable differences.

In this case, therefore, I do not press the whole body of conclusions of the advanced theologians. Probably any prudent man or woman, who is concerned about the truth of his or her convictions, will select a few points of fundamental importance, learn how the majority of the more scientific divines stand on these matters, and examine such of the evidence as it is possible to examine without expert training or a command of languages. This is what I propose to do. Whether there ever was an Abraham or a Jonah, whether Paul did or did not write *Hebrews*, is comparatively unimportant.

This method of inquiry is easily applied to the Old Testament. The religious tradition, endorsed by Christ and sternly enforced by the Churches until the nineteenth century, was that Moses had written the Pentateuch. This is a position of importance, not only on account of the authority of the Churches and of Christ, who at once becomes a human and fallible person if Moses did not write the Pentateuch, but because of the stories contained in the early chapters of *Genesis*. I have pointed out the importance to Christianity of the story of the creation and fall of man. But we

have seen also that the whole series of legends, from the first line of *Genesis* onward, have no cosmological or historical value. The account of creation cannot by any ingenuity be twisted into harmony with the known story of the evolution of the earth and its inhabitants. I have, I think, read every attempt to do so. The story of a direct creation of a primitive human pair is plainly untrue. The Garden of Eden and the Fall are sheer myths. The flood is absolutely belied by the ample scientific record. Probably the majority even of religious people will admit that, if these early chapters of *Genesis* are clearly wrong, it is little use contending over the greater part of the Old Testament. The so-called history of the Hebrews, from Abraham onward, is of quite secondary interest to us. In fact, if the important first chapters of *Genesis* are wrong, we shall have little hesitation in parting with stories of patriarchs who lived hundreds of years, and of men who lodged for days in the bellies of fishes.

The authority of science in checking the early chapters is absolute. No living authority admits the flood or the confusion of tongues, or questions the evolution of man, body and mind. And the authority of physical and biological science is supported by historical research. We find creation-stories, and a legend of a deluge and a favoured family, amongst the literary relics of the Mesopotamian civilisations. The legends or culture of the great civilisations of Babylon and Nineveh would spread far and carry great authority over the surrounding regions, and it is clear that, in

a slightly modified form, they reached and were adopted by the primitive Hebrews. The legend of a deluge is, in fact, widespread, and the legend of a primitive golden age, or state of singular happiness of the first human pair, was found also in Egypt, India, northern Asia, southern Europe, and America.

The task of the Higher Critics was, therefore, to give the world a more reasonable view of the Pentateuch, and bring back to the Churches those who were repelled by the quite impossible traditional view, that Moses was inspired to write it. The clue given by Astruc was taken up. Any person can see for himself that *Genesis* opens with two different accounts of the creation; and, on looking at the Hebrew text, we find that one of these calls the Creator *Jahveh* and the other *Elohim*. These two documents or traditions were then traced throughout the Pentateuch. They are embedded or incorporated in a third writing, and it was naturally assumed that this was the work of a later writer, who used the earlier legends. But further and more accurate research, through the greater part of the Old Testament, showed that there were *two* successive re-editions of the old legends. Some fourth writer or writers had, at a late date, re-edited almost the whole of the Hebrew scriptures and given us the Old Testament as it is.

On this reasonable view the overwhelming majority of the learned theologians of all Churches, except the Roman Catholic (to which I return later), are agreed. When Bishop Colenso in 1862

honestly pointed out the inconsistencies and contradictions of the Old Testament, and tried by some such hypothesis as the above to give a reasonable account of them, the English Church rose in anger and alarm. To-day its leading divines and the majority of its clergy accept the theory. Once the truthfulness of *Genesis* is broken, as it is, the Bible must either be laid aside or studied as a human document. The new view is, of course, put forward to the accompaniment of ornate rhetoric. It is a "grander" view of the Bible. It presents us with a "unique" example of the evolution of a literature. And so on. Frankly, it has completely laicised the greater part of the Old Testament; it has made a great breach in the authority of the Churches; and it has taught the laity that what they were for centuries urged and commanded to respect as the "word of God" is the word of an uncivilised or semi-civilised people.

The conclusions of modern biblical science are so easily consulted, and my purpose is so restricted, that again I can only summarise. The *Encyclopædia Biblica* will be found the most convenient and most authoritative work to consult, and it provides, under each article, an ample bibliography for the reader who would go deeper into the subject. It contains, of course, besides the commonplaces of biblical science, some of the theories and conclusions of the more advanced divines. I am, however, not so much concerned with these. I wish to show that accepted results of scientific and historical culture have entirely discredited the



old veneration for the "word of God" and the authority of the religion which for fifteen hundred years imposed it as such.

To speak summarily, therefore, and to avoid points which are seriously controverted, it is now generally agreed that the earliest parts of the Old Testament go back to about 900 B.C. There may be earlier fragments of tribal tradition included in these sections, but the Saul and David stories are believed to have been the earliest connected narratives, and the scattered stories are believed to have been gathered into a continuous chronicle in the ninth or eighth century. What the earlier history of the Hebrews really was we do not know. Many scholars conclude that a large group of the hardly civilised Semitic tribes moved west from Mesopotamia about 1300 B.C., and that, while the Ammonites, Moabites, and Edomites at once settled in Palestine, the Israelites continued to wander in the desert, as it were, or may even have settled on the Egyptian frontier. The theory betrays some sort of wish to connect the Israelites with Egypt, but we may accept it as a temporary conjecture. About 1100 B.C. the Israelites are thought to have moved on to Palestine and, after the years of struggle which are reflected and magnified in the Old Testament, founded a very modest kingdom at Judæa.

All this is, like every conjecture in a field where evidence is scanty, hazy and uncertain. But it has scientific grounds, which lend it some probability, while the traditional view has no grounds at all. The numerous palpable blunders and

inconsistencies of the Old Testament sufficiently show that it is not what it professes to be, and what the later Jews held it to be. Its early cosmography is child-like; its account of man's early history is demonstrably wrong; its record of the early ages of Israel is clearly mythical. We have no sound reason to think that Moses ever existed, and keen search in the Egyptian monuments has not brought to light a single trace of the presence of such a tribe in Egypt. We therefore take the most plausible view of the real features of this obscure early period.

With the earliest prophets, Amos and Hosea, who belong to the middle of the eighth century, we get the first Hebrew literature of some contemporary value; and their moral sentiments are so crude that we are confirmed in thinking that the Israelites had then barely emerged from barbarism. Micah (who is as crude as Hosea) and the writer of the early part of *Isaiah* followed. The Hebrew language naturally changed as the little people became civilised, and a competent student of that tongue can discriminate just as an English scholar can discriminate between English documents of the thirteenth, the sixteenth, or the nineteenth century. It is quite absurd to say that the order of books of the Old Testament assigned by the biblical scholars is fanciful or purely speculative.

Then, probably in the seventh (some say the sixth) century, the first great revision of the tribal scriptures took place. *Deuteronomy* was foisted upon the people as a book of Moses, and the various historical and other writings were used by

the priests to concoct a consecutive narrative from the creation of the world. The purpose was, of course, to assign the founding of the priesthood to Moses and secure its authority. Whatever language divines use about this pious fraud—and they are practically agreed upon it—it was a sheer deception and piece of priestcraft, in the worst sense of the word. The ignorant people were deliberately duped, and by that fraud the priests gained enormously. The action was much the same as that of the Papal writers who at a later date forged documents in order to establish the Papal authority. The men who did this were amongst the most religious and virtuous of the time in Italy. The end justified the means. But we do not quite understand the Protestant divine who sternly denounces the Papal forgeries and speaks tenderly about the forgeries of the Hebrew priests.

Prophets continued to arise, before, during, and after the Babylonian Captivity, which is plainly reflected in their work. The transportation of the bulk of the nation to the distant metropolis and the long sojourn there weakened the national tradition. The greater part of the Hebrews settled in the great city on the Euphrates. Judæa was indolent and small long after the Jews were free to return. This gave the priesthood its second great opportunity, and the Hebrew sacred literature was re-written and given the shape in which we find it to-day. Again this is not a matter of pure speculation. The work was, from the modern point of view, done so clumsily that the

various books contain numerous anachronisms and contradictions. Any candid person who studies these, and realises how they point to an effort to make a ritual and sacerdotal religion appear centuries earlier than it really was, will understand why the majority of our divines have been compelled to admit this second comprehensive forgery, in the days of Esdras.

It is enough for my purpose that the great majority of learned Protestant theologians take this view. We will see presently that the expressions of opinion of Catholic theologians need not be taken into account here, because a reactionary Papacy has drastically checked liberalism and openly rewarded illiberalism in that Church. The evidence itself, even for a man who cannot judge the various ages of the Hebrew text, is convincing enough. The greater part of the Old Testament is a more or less clumsy fabrication, in which priestly writers have put together the older literature or legends of the race—fragments of Babylonian and Egyptian culture, tribal traditions, etc.—and given an absolutely false complexion, in their own interest, to the history of the Hebrews themselves. The story of the miraculous deliverance from Egypt, the giving of the law and establishment of the priesthood in the desert, and the guidance into Palestine, is as palpably false as the first page of *Genesis*. It is worse : it is a deliberate forgery in the interest of the priesthood.

In order to adhere to these plain and generally admitted lines I will not deal with the later books. These were generally composed under Persian and

(after 332) Greek influence. *Daniel* is the last of the forgeries, a crude composition which no scholar places before the year 300, and most divines assign to 168 or 167 B.C. But it is the significance of the new general view of the Old Testament with which I am mainly concerned. Quite clearly this discovery, made almost entirely by theologians, deals an even heavier blow than science dealt at the prestige of the Churches and the clergy. For long centuries they imposed upon ignorant Europe a colossal delusion. They kept the Bible in their own hands, on the plea that they were especially trained if not supernaturally aided to interpret it, and they glossed its errors and contradictions with glib sophistry. When enlightenment began they showered abuse upon clerics, like Colenso and Robertson Smith, who would have the truth out. Even to-day a number of their scholars strain every nerve to find fragments of truth in the discredited writings—as if that mattered—and a high proportion of the ordinary clergy close their eyes to the scholarship of their own divines and continue to delude the ignorant.

Nor can one accept the new assurances with which preachers seek to cover this loss of prestige. That the Old Testament is a “unique” literature is true only in the sense that the Vedas and the Avesta are unique sacred literatures. It is really unique, as far as our knowledge goes, only in respect of the colossal priestly deception we have discovered. On the other hand, we may readily acknowledge that it contains some “great litera-

ture." Parts of the prophets and psalms appeal powerfully to every man of candid mind and fine taste. Unhappily, many of these very passages are instinct with moral sentiments of the crudest nature. Intense vindictiveness runs through them like a vein of hot blood. The conception of the Almighty is often at a barbaric level. One virtue only is conspicuous in the prophets—justice; and this is easily understood when we know that the prophets were the spokesmen of the poor against the rich. It is easy to preach a virtue which it is for the other man to practise—to your profit. To impose such a book on our children, as the clergy insist, to stamp upon their minds as literal truth the legends of Eden and Flood and Babel and Moses and Jericho, to conceal from them all that these clergy have in mind when they invite the adult to see that the Old Testament is now a "unique literature," is little better than the ancient Hebraic sharp practice of Esdras and his colleagues.

The clergy, in effect, sacrificed the Old Testament. To abandon the doctrine of the Fall was, as we shall see, a step only to be contemplated under extreme pressure. To surrender the prophetic foregleams of the Messiah was hard. But the pressure was inexorable. The Old Testament is no longer a foundation of Christianity. The New Testament suffices, the later Victorian clergy said; but already the critics were at work upon the New Testament, and it has fared little better than the Old at the hands of scholarly divines.

Again let us take a broad view and not confuse

our minds with detailed controversies on which divines differ. Again, also, let us leave out of account the Church of Rome, in which a man must either think as an ignorant Pope thinks or, like Professor Loisy, the one great biblical scholar the Church has produced in recent years, seek freedom and honour outside. We then find a general agreement among divines, and it is as drastic as the evidence for it is convincing. These divines quarrel as to how many Epistles Paul wrote, or if he wrote any (which Dr. Kuenen, a devout theologian of Leyden University, denies). They quarrel as to the amount of *Acts* which we may regard as historical, and the date of *Revelation*. But they are generally agreed that not one of the Gospels was written before the year 70—that is to say, nearly forty years after the death of Christ; that even the three earlier Gospels, which they variously date from 70 to 110, were largely altered and supplemented afterwards; and that *John* is a fanciful composition of the third decade of the second century. These blows shatter the fabric of historical Christianity.

I have in other works given the detailed evidence for the varied criticisms which I here accumulate and organise, and I must refer the unfamiliar reader to those, or to the works of others, for the full evidence. Briefly, you can date an anonymous work only by internal or external evidence. The story narrated in the Gospels is so vague (as to topography, etc.) that it does not suggest an eye-witness at all. Even if it were more vivid and detailed, we know that these qualities are at the

command of a good story-teller. On the other hand, we find in the Gospels not only very plain descriptions of the historical fall of Jerusalem, which puts them later than the year 70, but many references to persecution, scandals among the brethren, bringing quarrels before the community, etc., which imply an even later date. In sum, the internal evidence merely suggests that the Gospels were written "some time after 70 A.D.," possibly much later. The various more or less precise dates offered us by theologians are very precarious and speculative. The evidence is of the last degree of feebleness.

The external test is even more destructive. It is enough to recall that in 1905 the Oxford Society of Historical Theology (a Christian body, of course) appointed a committee to search the writings of Christians earlier than the year 130 for evidence that they were acquainted with the Gospels. The result, which was published, was an almost complete blank. There was no reference to the Gospels, and few words of Christ were quoted as we find them in the Gospels.

Now this is very serious evidence; while there is no evidence at all for the traditional view. We have absolutely no good evidence that our Gospels existed before the year 130. Divines very plausibly—in my opinion, quite justly—contend that *in some form* the Gospels did exist in the first century. I take the view that Christ was an historical person, probably (as Mr. George Moore has suggested in his great story *The Brook Kerith*) an Essenian monk who left his monastery by the



Jordan to preach salvation to the erring townsmen. The Persian belief that God would destroy the world and judge all men, and set up a "kingdom of heaven" (which you find running through the sacred book of the ancient Persians), had spread to Judæa, and the conviction or feeling had grown that the end was near, and would come very suddenly. Jesus seems to have been a profoundly religious man, of great fervour though little knowledge, who shared this view, and went out of his monastery to save his fellows from "the wrath to come."

But this is merely a theory of what is really likely to have happened in the first century of our era. Not a single document of the first century, sacred or profane, which is extant to-day gives us an account of the life of Jesus. Even if we admit (on slender grounds) that *Matthew*, *Mark*, and *Luke* were written between 70 and 90 A.D., we find the divines who tell us this assuring us that considerable additions and interpolations were afterwards made in them. The stories about the birth and the events after the death of Jesus are notoriously second-century additions to the Gospels. The second-century Christians, perhaps more innocently, did what Esdras and his priestly colleagues had done. They re-cast the Scriptures and added legends in their own interest. It is no use telling us that a Gospel existed in the year 60 or 65 or 70 when we do not know what was in it. I quite agree with learned theologians who say that the words, for instance: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" seem early and authentic.

As a candid historian I would infer that *probably* here we have a genuine glimpse of Christian origins; a devout reformer, hostile to the priests, put to death for his views. But very few texts give us this impression, and we must simply regard the Gospels as the outcome of a slow and gradual development of a legendary life. That is what constantly happened in the ancient east.

Divines have, in effect, sacrificed the *life* of Jesus (especially the legends about his birth and resurrection) and concentrated on his words. *Mark* is the oldest Gospel, and it gives little more than the words of Jesus. The first and natural thing to do, we are told, was to collect the wonderful sayings of the great prophet. The legends of miracles were added later. In the opening words of *Luke* we have a naive statement of this. "Many," it seems, had written lives of Christ before this unknown author.

This is the only aspect of the question of which I have made an original study (in my *Sources of the Morality of the Gospels*), and I have shown that the so-called teaching of Christ in the Gospels is as thoroughly unreliable as are the miraculous stories. A very large amount of the supposed preaching was demonstrably not spoken by Christ, yet this is as fine as any other parts of the Gospels. The parables themselves have in some cases clearly been borrowed from the Jewish rabbinical schools, and are much superior, as a rule, in the Jewish original (in the *Talmud*). There is not a single moral sentiment ascribed to Christ which was not well known in that ancient world. The Gospels

seem to be a gradual compilation of the sayings of moralists of the ancient world, just as they are of the legends of that world. By the fourth decade of the second century, a hundred years after the death of Jesus, the compilations were completed as we now have them, save for a few slight later additions. We cannot trust such documents.

The reader may now be less surprised that I spoke of history as having done graver injury than science to the prestige of the Churches. To have mistaken the folk-lore of *Genesis* for revealed truth during eighteen centuries is, after all, an error that clerical prestige might have survived. But for the Bible, and especially the Gospels, to have been proved historically unreliable means the disappearance of the chief foundation of Christianity. The result is that the more learned divines are compelled to reconstruct their belief in a form which ceases to have a distinctive character. Christ becomes a zealous human reformer, imperfectly known to us on account of the successive editions of the Gospels. The miraculous birth and resurrection and the miracles are abandoned by a large number of the more learned theologians of every country, and *very* few laymen of any intellectual distinction profess to believe them. The doctrine of atonement or redemption is still more generally abandoned. That is a plain admission of the intellectual bankruptcy of Christianity, as Europe has known it for fifteen centuries.

I have made an exception, as in the last section, for the Church of Rome. In that body one must still literally believe or be expelled. As a result

there has been a remarkable exodus of scholarly men from Rome during the last twenty years. The professions of the remainder will not weigh much with any man who knows the circumstances. One should read such works as the *Histoire du Modernisme Catholique* and *La Question Biblique au XX<sup>e</sup> Siècle* of Albert Houtin, one of the scholarly priests of France who, like Professor Loisy, has left Rome for Rationalism. They show that the reign of the late Pope, Pius X, was one of the most extraordinary episodes of modern times. The reactionary extravagance and ignorance of the Pope and his supporters and favourites almost pass belief. As the present Pope, Benedict XV, has given no later freedom or encouragement to scholars, we cannot seriously consider the professions of Catholic writers. They are, in historical matters, on a level with those ridiculous pronouncements of men like Father Wasmann and Father Muckermann to which I referred in the last section.

## CHAPTER III

### THE EVOLUTION OF RELIGIONS

THE life of Christ which the clergy have imposed upon Europe for fifteen centuries has, I incidentally said, grown by a slow ingathering of myths and other elements in an age of great credulity. The legendary life of Buddha in the further east is a notable example. The life of most founders of religions has been similarly glorified. The life of Apollonius of Tyana is especially instructive. He was a wandering religious teacher of the first century, yet when his life first appeared in literary form, about a century and a quarter after his death, it swarmed with similar miracles to those of the Gospels. More instructive still is the fate of a modern Persian reformer, Ali Mohammed, or "The Bab," who was executed, at the instigation of the priests, in 1850. He was a simple and sincere reformer, like Christ; and when the full gospel of his life appeared, forty years later, it was as richly adorned with miracles as the story of Jesus!

The story of Apollonius of Tyana was well known to the Deists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the way in which they pressed the analogy with Jesus may be regarded as the germ of the modern science of comparative religions. This is another branch of historical science, in the

sense in which I have described it. There came a point when lay culture no longer consented to be restricted to "profane" matters. Religion is one of the outstanding characteristics of human evolution, and the new culture, which was busy re-constructing the past and re-interpreting the present, was naturally attracted to it. The result has been one more profound and disastrous blow at the prestige of the clergy and the Churches. Again I must confine myself to a summary, and in this case a very brief summary. But the comprehensive aversion of our modern leaders of culture from Christianity cannot entirely be understood unless a general outline of this further attack is given.

The essence of the clerical contention on this side was that Christianity was unspeakably superior to all the other religions of the world, alike in ethic and dogma. It was a religion apart, founded upon revelation. The world had lain in darkness and the shadow of death until Christ came to illumine it. The monstrous inaccuracy of this as far as morals are concerned will be shown in the next chapter. Here let us see how on the dogmatic side scientific or historical research has riddled the old clerical pretension and undeceived the world.

The opening of India to European scholars, after our occupation of that country, may be taken as a starting-point; and from India the research spread, with the growth of travel, to all parts of the near and the far east. Philologists like Max Müller began to discover and defend the eastern religions. The Hindu Veda and the Persian Avesta and the Chinese King were carefully studied, and gradually

translated into English. The Buddhist books began to reveal their very high code of morals. The Koran of the Mohammedans was read with more discrimination. Missionaries replied with slanders of the eastern religions—like the long discredited, but still widely believed, legend of the ear of Juggernaut—but the appreciation of the eastern religions grew. Other branches of science and history were, we saw, meantime darkening the Christian prospect and disposing men to reconsider the traditions which the clergy had fastened upon Europe.

As the nineteenth century proceeded another vein of research opened. The mounds which covered the ruins of the older Empires were removed, and the real features of ancient Babylon and Nineveh and Thebes came to light. It was very quickly discovered that the characters of these earlier civilisations had been grossly slandered by Jews and Christians. They had high moral ideals, and in doctrine they often approached Christianity. It was realised that, as is now well known, monotheism was recognised in ancient Egypt and Babylonia ages before it was taught by the Jews. Egypt and Persia had, moreover, a most vivid belief in the immortality of the soul and the judgment of the dead by God. Babylonia had slain gods, who rose from the dead, thousands of years before Christ existed. Virgin-mothers and miraculous births and saviours proved to be quite numerous. In the first flush of discovery, before the documents were critically examined, it looked as if what had been thought the chief distinctions of the Christian story

were quite the usual features of a religious legend. The records of ancient Mexico and Peru were studied, and the same thing was discovered. On the very soil on which priests were preaching the unique blessings of Christianity it appeared that priests of Quetzalcoatl and Tetzcatlipoca had been hearing confessions, and inducing the young to enter monasteries and nunneries, and preaching slain gods, hundreds of years before the Spaniards came.

Much of this comparative mythology had, of course, been known to earlier writers. One might think more leniently of the clergy if the truth had been so hidden that the research of a scientific age was needed to bring it to light. This was not the case. Missionaries had for centuries been familiar with the Buddhist and Hindu books in Asia, and it is largely from the writings of early Spanish missionaries that we know the very significant features of the old Mexican religion. Greek and Roman literature has been open to all scholars since the fifteenth century, and we have needed scarcely any new discoveries to convince us that Athens and Rome were gravely slandered in the prevailing tradition. Even the beliefs of the older Egyptians and Babylonians and Persians were partly discoverable from the writings of the Christian fathers. It was the will to know and proclaim the truth that was lacking. The dogma of the supernatural superiority of Christianity was so resolutely enforced that the clergy did not even notice that all the ethic of the New Testament is contained in the later books of the Old. While they were extolling



the "unique" splendour of Christ in urging the Golden Rule, they were using Bibles which, in their marginal notes, reminded them that Christ's words, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," were merely a quotation from *Leviticus* (xix, 18), which a further marginal note dated 1490 B.C.!

At first these new discoveries fell like a shower of hail upon the clergy, who were already distracted by the stinging criticisms of scientists and historians and biblical scholars. Then there arose upon the horizon of modern thought the luminous truth of evolution, and all the weird and disconnected myths and beliefs became a symmetrical growth. It was the Christian world that had "lain in darkness." As in a faint and clouded moonlight, men had seen round them the forms or the relics of other religions, and had felt no kinship and shown no penetration. They had heard of human sacrifices amongst savages, of "women weeping over Tammuz," of Greek virgin-mothers, of Persian saviours, of Egyptian judgments of souls. It seemed to them an unintelligible medley of religious forms. The light broke slowly upon the mind of the nineteenth century. Points of contact were discovered. Nations and religions were linked into families. In the end it was seen that religion was a consistent growth, a tree with common roots and branches, germinating in the dark mind of primitive man, spreading into the diverse creeds of the historical and the modern period.

Against this growing belief the clergy fiercely struggled. It robbed Christianity of its "uniqueness." It discredited the claim of a special revela-

tion and a privileged priesthood. Protestants were not grieved to see its bearing upon Catholicism. In proportion as scholarship discovered candles and incense and sacraments, veneration of saints and relics and holy mothers, monks and nuns and vestments, in "pagan" religions, the Protestant was gratified. These things, he had always said, were not in the Scriptures. But this new science of the evolution of religions went farther. Quite clearly it is the business of such a science to see if Christianity will fit in the general scheme of evolution. If it will not—if it presents features of doctrine or morality for which we can assign no natural origin—the theologian will have a better case than ever. But the authorities of the science in our day are practically unanimous that it *does* fit in the general scheme. There is nothing in Christianity that puzzles them; nothing which points to a supernatural agency. There is no historical ground for dividing the chronicle of man, as by a flaming sword, into two parts: Before and After Christ. The stream of religious development flowed quite smoothly nineteen hundred years ago. It quietly passed into a new reach. There was no miracle, no leap upward.

The concern of the clergy at this new threat is a good measure of their loss of prestige now that the blow has fallen. For it *has* fallen. Christianity was, like the bicycle or the United States, evolved. It is not a sudden phenomenon, with highly original features, popping up in the stream of history. It is superior in many respects to older religions. We quite expect later human developments to be saner

than those which they supersede. It is, on the other hand, inferior in many respects to Buddhism, Stoicism, or Mohammedanism. Its development is, in any case, no more miraculous than the development of Socialism.

What we saw in the last chapter will help to explain this. In the seventh century before Christ the Jews were a small, backward people of Palestine with a crude and restricted sacred literature. Like most of their small neighbours, they believed in one god—their own—though they would have been greatly puzzled if one had told them that the gods of the other nations did not exist. Then the Babylonians fell upon them, and transported the flower of the little people to Babylon. Here they made the close acquaintance of several elaborate and powerful priesthoods, with ornate ritual and rich mythology. In the Persian civilisation, which soon afterwards succeeded Babylon and in turn overlorded the Jews, they again encountered powerful priesthoods with ritual and myths and vestments, and in this case a more ascetic code of morals. The Jewish clergy, we saw, then entirely re-cast their legends and writings, pretending that their new priesthood and ritual and legislation, which were founded on the Babylonian and Persian, had been divinely appointed under Moses and Aaron a thousand years before.

So far I am merely quoting the general opinion of modern divines, let us remember. It is equally agreed that in the fourth century Greek influence spread over Judæa, and under this influence the “wisdom-books,” written in Greek, were composed

and added to the collection. Now there is hardly a sentiment of the New Testament that is not found in these Jewish wisdom-books. Moreover, the Persian ideas had taken deep root, and some strange developments were seen in Judæa. The belief in angels and demons was intensified. The belief in a coming end of the world and general judgment spread. The expectation that a Messiah, a special envoy of Jahveh, would yet deliver them from their miseries was associated with this. As the political situation became more and more hopeless, the Romans succeeding the Greeks as their masters, many of the Jews began to believe that the "redemption" would be spiritual. Large numbers began to desert the cities or their farms, and, under the name of Essenes, live a life of voluntary poverty and chastity and extreme pacifism in something like monastic communities. They foreswore carnal intercourse, never took oaths, refused sacrifice at the temple, avoided money, and held all things in common; as Josephus describes in his *Jewish War* (II, 8, 2-14).

Now, whether Jesus was or was not an Essene monk, here, on indisputable authority, are his ideas current in Judæa before and at the commencement of our era. Whether those ideas came of Persian or Buddhist or Pythagorean influence, or a mixture of all three, does not matter for the moment. The scientific student of Christianity is satisfied when he finds those ideas current in the Greek-Roman world, and notably in Judæa, before the time of Christ. The characteristic features of the *real* Christ, as distinct from the mythical Christ of the

later Gospels, are, our divines say, hostility to ritual religion, refusal of animal sacrifices, a purely spiritual message, the recommendation of poverty and asceticism, the exhortation to brotherly love and peacefulness and passive resistance to evil. Very good. These things were taught by Buddha in the seventh century, and we know that a Buddhist mission reached Syria; by the more ascetic of the Persians who followed Zarathustra, also of the seventh century; by Pythagoras and his followers over the Greek world in the sixth century; by the worshippers of Serapis in Egypt and other provinces; by the Essenes in Palestine. So we see no more miracle in Jesus preaching these sentiments than we do in the contemporary or little later preaching of them by Apollonius or Epictetus or (in large part) Plutarch.

Without in the least departing from the realm of natural causation, we might be prepared to accept Jesus as a highly gifted and original moralist, advancing a little upon this familiar moral idealism of his time, or expressing it in a language of unique grace or effectiveness. But the historical facts do not justify us even in saying this. One will generally find that the preachers and religious writers who most emphatically speak of the Christian ethic as "unique" and "superior to all others" have never read a page of the moral writings of the Persians or Egyptians, the Talmud, or the works of the Greeks and Romans. As usual, the blind lead the blind; and with pathetic obstinacy millions cling to their ill-instructed clerical leaders and refuse to listen to even the unanimous teaching of

scholars. As I have shown in the work to which I have referred, and as many divines now admit, there is no originality in the moral teaching of the Gospels; and there is no evidence that the language in which it is put is the language of Jesus, while there is much evidence to the contrary. All that we can say is that it acquires a certain intensity of fervour from the belief that the world may come to an end at any moment and men will, if they are caught in sin, be doomed to an eternity of horrible punishment; and that belief was, as events have proved, a delusion, based upon a Persian superstition.

The science of comparative religion then inquires how the mythical Jesus of the Gospels was evolved, and the task is not difficult. We do not know where the Gospels were written, but we know that at the time they were written Christianity was spread over the eastern end of the Mediterranean at least from Alexandria to Corinth, and the final Gospels were most probably written in that region. Now in these cities the myths and creeds and priesthoods of all religions were richly represented. Priests of Egypt, Syria, Persia, Greece, Rome, and of less known provinces of the Empire, set up their temples and vigorously proselytised everywhere. Myths, legends, and rites passed easily from one religion to another. Many of the myths were found to resemble each other closely in religions which came from quite distant countries, and, as usual, priests were ready to assert that the rival religion had a "glimpse" of the truth, but the name of the god must be altered. There never was such a "melting-pot" in the history of the world as that

eastern shore of the Mediterranean in the first century of our era, when Rome fused the nations into one Empire.

Careful research into the monuments of the old Empires, the sacred books of the old religions, the writings of the Christian fathers and certain of the pagans, has now established that all the chief mythical elements of the life of Jesus already existed in that cosmopolitan world. The healing and other miracles do not, of course, require any special study. Such things are not only ascribed to holy men in the Old Testament, but they were claimed in every nation and religion of that uncritical age. It will be enough to show briefly how little originality there is in the stories of the miraculous birth, the atoning death, and the resurrection of Jesus.

The works of the Right Hon. J. M. Robertson (*Christianity and Mythology*, *Pagan Christs*, etc.) contain an exhaustive and learned study of this important branch of comparative religion. Mr. Robertson has, in fact, traced mythical parallels to the Gospel stories in such minute detail that he is convinced that no such person as Jesus ever existed; that the whole story is a mythical compilation, founded on a sacred drama or mystery-play. Approaching the subject from the historical point of view, I prefer the theory that a devout reformer of the name of Jesus did exist in Judæa in the first half of the first century, and probably, like Ali Mohammed, was put to death for his religious revolt. But the evidence accumulated by Mr. Robertson, and in part repeated and expanded by Sir J. G. Frazer in his *Golden Bough*, must convince

any impartial person that the stories of the birth, resurrection, and atoning mission of Jesus are but the application to Jesus of myths that were widely current in the religions of the time. Since, however, I am not in this case quoting the authority of a compact body of scientific men—comparative religion has not yet reached that stage of independence—I will here give the passages and authorities for the more important points, and the reader will be able to form his own judgment. I translate the passages directly from the Latin or Greek originals.

The death and resurrection of Christ are probably to the average believer the central and unique truth of the Christian religion. Now every well-informed theologian has known for ages that in the Roman world in which Christianity arose the annual commemoration of the death and resurrection of a god was the most common religious feature. The Egyptian cult of Osiris, the Babylonian cult of Tammuz (or Adonis), and the Phrygian cult of Attis had celebrated this annual solemnity for unknown ages, and had, in the fusion of nations in the Roman Empire, spread it over the whole eastern world. The Greeks adopted the festival centuries before Christ was born; the Persian cult of Mithra also adopted it. It is safe to say that there was not a city of that old world, before the time of Christ, which had not one or more temples, of different religions, attracting full public attention to the annual celebration of the death and resurrection of a god.

This was well known to learned divines, because the fact is noted in the Bible itself and in the writings of many of the early Christians. In *Ezekiel*



(viii, 14) we read : "And behold there sat women weeping for Tammuz." If we turn to the most learned of the early commentators on *Ezekiel*, St. Jerome, we read of this Tammuz (or Adonis, as the Greeks called the god) :

"According to the pagan fable, this lover of Venus and most beautiful youth is said to have been born in the month of June, and to have risen from the dead, and therefore they call the said month of June by his name, and annually celebrate a solemnity in memory of him, in the course of which he is mourned by women as one dead, and afterwards chants and praises are sung to him as one risen from the dead."<sup>1</sup>

Jerome was at this time (the last decade of the fourth century) living in Palestine, and he brings the myth very close to Christianity when, in one of his letters, he says :

"This Bethlehem which is now ours, and is the most august spot on earth, was foreshadowed by a grove of Tammuz—that is to say, Adonis; in the cave where the infant Christ once wailed the lover of Venus had been mourned."<sup>2</sup>

An earlier Christian writer, Firmicus Maternus, wrote a work called *The Errors of Profane Religions*, in which he describes the general spread of this myth and celebration. Of the Egyptians he says (Ch. II) :

"They have in a temple an image of Osiris buried, and this they honour with an annual lamentation; they shave their heads . . . they beat their breasts. And when they have done this for

<sup>1</sup> *Commentary upon Ezekiel*, Migne edition of the Latin Fathers, Vol. XXV, col. 82. Jerome adds that educated pagans regard this as a symbol of the annual death and re-birth of vegetation. So most of the Christian and pagan writers say.

<sup>2</sup> *Letter to Paulinus* (LVIII), Migne, Vol. XXII, col. 581.

a few days they pretend that they have found the fragments of the torn body [of Osiris], and they lay aside their grief and rejoice."

In the succeeding chapters the Christian writer describes the celebration amongst the Phrygians, the Syrians, and other peoples. "In most cities of the east," he says, "Adonis is mourned as the husband of Venus and . . . his wound is exhibited to the spectators." In the 23rd chapter he, referring to the celebration in Rome itself, apparently in the Mithraic temples, gives very significant details :

"On a certain night an image is laid upon a bier, and it is mourned in solemn chants. When they are sated with this fictitious lamentation a light is brought in. Then the mouths of all the mourners are anointed by a priest, who murmurs slowly : 'Rejoice, followers of the saved god, because there is for you a relief from your grief.'"

Firmicus goes on to ridicule the Mithraist, and gives us further details :

"Thou dost bury an image, thou dost mourn an image, thou dost bring forth an image from the grave, and, wretched man, when thou hast done this thou dost rejoice. . . . Thou dost arrange the members of the recumbent stone. . . . So the devil also has his Christs."

And to this the learned Benedictine editors of this interesting little work append a footnote in which they say :

"This dramatic representation, in which a dead man [god] was mourned and was honoured, in the dark, with chanted lamentations, until, the lights being lit, the mourning turned to joy, we find in different forms in almost all the mysteries."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Migne, Vol. XII, col. 1032.

The resemblance to the Christian celebration—in the Mithraic temples it went so far that the resurrected god was hailed as “the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world”—was so disturbing to Firmicus Maternus that he believed that the devil had conveyed these legends to the pagans in order to distract them from embracing the *true* (Christian) version of the death and resurrection! St. Augustine also describes the annual festival as it took place publicly, with immense crowds, at Rome. St. Cyril of Alexandria says:

“The Greeks invented [borrowed] a solemnity in which they mourned with Venus for the death of Adonis, and then affected to rejoice when they found returning from the under-world him whom they sought; and this ridiculous ceremony took place in the temples of Alexandria down to our own time.”<sup>1</sup>

That the Greeks had the festival long before Christ one reads in the pages of Plutarch's *Lives*. In the life of Alcibiades (XVIII), for instance, he describes the sailing of the Greek fleet, in 415 B.C., to Syracuse, and adds:

“It was an evil omen that the festival of Adonis fell in those very days. Numbers of women bare images, like dead bodies, and held mock funerals; and they mourned and chanted the solemn hymns.”

The Roman writer Ammianus Marcellinus (*Res gestæ*, XXII, 9, 15) describes a similar ominous coincidence of the mourning over Tammuz when Julian, in 362 A.D., entered Antioch. “It seemed sad,” he says, “that the immense city and the houses of its chief men were full, as the Emperor

<sup>1</sup> *Commentary on Isaiah*, II, 3 (Migne ed., Vol. LXX, col. 441).

entered, of howling lamentations and lugubrious sounds."

But the references to this annual celebration of a slain and resurrected god are too numerous to quote. In Mr. Robertson's *Christianity and Mythology* further details are given, and the festival is extended to the religions of India; a fact which does not surprise us now that we know that the Hindus and Persians were one united people about 1500 B.C., in Asia Minor or Syria. Sir J. G. Frazer, in his *Golden Bough* (Part IV, "Adonis, Attis, Osiris"), minutely follows the celebration over the nearer east, and traces it, in its Egyptian form, far back into the mists of antiquity. In some regions the festival took place in the spring, in others in the summer, and in a few during the winter. In one form or other people, long before Christ was born, annually lamented the death and resurrection of their god from Carthage to Babylon and from India to Rome. In most cases an image of the dead god was laid up on a bier or in a tomb, and a few days of lamentation ended suddenly, often with blaze of candles and odour of incense and the joyous note of the flute, in the gladness of a resurrection. The man who can believe that the story of Christ being laid in a tomb and rising from it, to the astonishment of mourning women, three days later—a story which was interpolated in the Gospels in the second century—represents a real event, and is not an adaptation to a spiritual religion of the universal belief, has large powers of faith.

The birth of a god was similarly honoured, generally at midwinter, in this vast and cosmopolitan Roman world. It is notorious that at that period

the Romans celebrated their Saturnalia, or birth of Saturn, and that this circumstance moved the Church to place the birth of Christ on December 25th. The Mithraists, who came nearest to Christianity in ritual and ethic, each year celebrated the birth of the Saviour Mithra in a cave-temple on the 25th of December; and the blaze of candles, the clouds of incense, the white-robed priests and silver chalices must have given their cave-temple on the Vatican Hill a remarkable resemblance to the "midnight mass" of the Christian temple which displaced it. The most popular of the Greek cults, that of Dionysus or Bacchus, habitually represented the god as a child in a cradle, and exhibited the figure, in honour of his birth, on the 25th of December. The third great religion of the Roman world, that of the Egyptian virgin-mother Isis and her son Horus, similarly celebrated the birth of the divine child about December 25th. The Roman writer Macrobius, speaking in his *Saturnalia* of the representation of the gods as of different ages, says (I, 18) :

"These differences of age refer to the sun, which seems to be a babe at the winter solstice, as the Egyptians represent him in their temples on a certain day; that being the shortest day, he is then supposed to be small and an infant."

A later Christian writer (the author of the *Paschal Chronicle*) was so struck by the parallel that he invented an even more ingenious reason than that of Firmicus :

"Jeremiah gave a sign to the Egyptian priests, saying that their idols would be destroyed by a child-saviour, born of a virgin and lying in a

manger. Wherefore they still worship as a goddess a virgin-mother, and adore an infant in a manger.”<sup>1</sup>

It is enough for my purpose to show that the legends connected with the birth and death of Christ are commonplaces of mythology. The great mass of believers, misled by preachers who are ignorant of comparative religion, still fancy that these stories are quite the most characteristic and precious part of the Christian gospel. They believe that Christmas, Good Friday, and Easter are days of great and unique significance which brought *their glad message* to men only after Jesus had “visited the earth.”

The preceding extracts must convince any that this is as far from the truth as belief could be. Myths that were thousands, probably tens of thousands, of years old were simply grafted upon the story of Jesus, and the religions and literature which betrayed the borrowing were thrust out of sight. Europe merely gave a new name to celebrations of the birth, death, and resurrection of gods which go back into the dimmest recesses of history. Not only is the “fall” of man a myth; the divine birth and atonement are equally mythical, and it is waste of time for theologians to attempt to put new “interpretations” upon them. Already many of them cry that it is the life, not the death, of Christ that matters. It is useless. This simple and sure inquiry into the beliefs and festivals of the religions which preceded our era has dealt the most formidable of all blows at the fabric of Christianity.

<sup>1</sup> Migne edition, Vol. XCII (Greek series), col. 385. Virgin-mothers were, of course, common in the pagan religions. The Greeks alone had half a dozen.

This is not the place to inquire into the real origin and nature of these myths. It has been widely believed that they refer, ultimately, to the annual death (or enfeeblement) of the sun as winter approaches, its re-birth at the solstice, and its resurrection (usually preceded by a dramatic representation of the death) in the spring. The seasons differ so much in different latitudes—the sun is so differently regarded in a tropical and a temperate clime—that confusion of dates is quite intelligible. In Egypt the annual fall and rise of the Nile was the chief factor. Sir J. G. Frazer, however, contends, as we saw, that these myths refer to the annual death and re-birth of the spirit of vegetation; a much more conspicuous case, to the ignorant mind, of death and resurrection. Probably both spectacles have had a share in inspiring and shaping the myths. The language of some of the old religions (Chinese, Mexican, Vedic, Persian, Egyptian, etc.) is strikingly astronomical, and the widespread tendency to celebrate solar dates like December 25th cannot be ignored. Probably the vegetation-motive was the first. The question would, however, require a more lengthy consideration than we can give here, and I wish to avoid speculative matters. What is clear is that the naive philosophy of primitive man, his childlike wonder at the annual death and re-birth of sun and flowers and corn, is the real root of the stories that still engross millions of our neighbours at Christmas and Easter.

And with the myths nearly every detail of the old ritual was taken over. The corn and the wine were the great gifts to men of this risen sun or

vegetation-god; they were his flesh and blood. As such they had in many religions a mystic or sacramental significance, and Christianity did but sustain the long tradition in making of them its "holy communion." Baptism and anointing with oil were also widely known. The actual phrases and hymns of the priests of Mithra, Isis, Osiris, Cybele, etc., were appropriated by the Christian priests and applied to Christ or Mary. Linen and silk vestments, blessed water, incense, candles, and scores of other details were borrowed from the disappearing "pagans." Special volumes must be consulted on these matters.

Nor can I in the least attempt here even to trace the outline of the stream of religious evolution in which all these things find their place. It starts in the dim mind of early prehistoric man, which we find surviving in the lowest savages of to-day. The belief in spirits appears early. The savage's world teems with spirits, good and evil, and he develops an elaborate code of magic to influence them and nature. Priests arise as a special caste to perform this important duty. More powerful spirits become gods. In the end the pride of a people in its own god declares him (Jahveh, for instance) the only true god; and the more learned priests of Egypt and Chaldæa, and the philosophers of Greece, rise to the idea of a supreme spiritual being. But this is only one strand of the religious evolution. It must suffice that we have seen how Christianity has lost every trace of its old prestige as a supernatural and unique religion. It is just one of the myriads of branches of the mighty tree that has grown out of the soil of primitive ignorance.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE RECORD OF CHRISTIANITY

As the plain truths which I have summarised in the preceding two chapters became known to all properly educated people, the evolution of Christianity proceeded along a line I have incidentally described. The emphasis was shifted from dogma to ethic. It was Christ's teaching, his splendid example, that were the real and distinctive essence of Christianity.

I have already shown that this is as unsound as the earlier belief in the unique nature of Christ's birth, mission, and death. The Gospels are so late and unreliable that we really know nothing with certainty about Christ's life. Much of what has been regarded as most inspiring in the life of Christ—his conduct in face of death—clearly belongs to the mythical part of the Gospels; most of the other valued traits are told only in *John*, which is the least historical of the four Gospels. As to the teaching of Christ, I have shown that it is unique neither in substance nor form. The reader must not misjudge me. I should find no difficulty in admitting that a rare moral and religious reformer, with great charm of utterance, arose in Judæa nineteen centuries ago. I go as far as the very unsatisfactory evidence will allow us in admitting something of the kind. But the fact is that the

Gospels are, judged on the ordinary rules of history, very unreliable documents.

The next step of the clergy was to say : Well, let us leave doctrine and history altogether. The fact is that the Gospels do contain a splendid ideal, whether or no it is historical and original. Let that fact stand for Christianity ; and then run over the history of Europe, and see what that ideal has done for civilisation. In spite of all your criticisms—granting all your claims—these advanced clergy say, Christianity remains the indispensable religion of Europe.

Now, whether the ideal of the Gospels is a fitting and effective ideal for modern times we can best examine when, in the last section, we consider the verdict of humanity. But the statement that this ideal, incorporated in the Christian religion, has been of incalculable service to Europe is an historical statement, and it must be tested here. It is one of the most frequent arguments in the mouths of those preachers who feel that the defence of dogma is now impracticable before any educated audience. Unfortunately for them, it is no new argument. It is merely a modern version of the old myth that the nations lay “in darkness and the shadow of death” until Christianity came.

In earlier ages this had a purely religious significance. The nations lay under sentence of eternal damnation until Christ expiated the crime of the common parents of mankind. As this dogma, based upon an imaginary fall of man, became untenable, it was sought to show that the nations were morally and materially in darkness until the

new religion dawned upon the world; that the adoption of Christian principles really brought about an immense social and moral, if not material, progress. Europe became the moral and intellectual centre of the planet because of its religion, it was said. Therefore it would not only be ungrateful, but possibly dangerous, to interfere with this foundation of our civilisation.

This is, as I said, an historical statement. It has nothing to do with a distinction between "profane" and "sacred" history. It is a version of the secular history of Europe. And the reader, now beginning to realise how little scholarship, or how much defiance of scholarship, there is amongst the clergy, will be prepared to hear that on this point we again have a conflict of religion and culture.

Already many religious writers are retreating. They do not, they say, underrate the high civilisations which preceded Christianity. They do not claim that Christianity *founded* the superior civilisation of Europe, but only that it contributed materially to it. Yet the great majority of preachers and religious writers continue to make claims which are flatly contradicted by modern history, and I must again sum up the situation and measure the damage done to the prestige of Christianity. I write, as usual, summarily. Those who would read the full evidence will find it, for the earlier part of this chapter, in my *Sources of the Morality of the Gospels*, and for the later part in my *Bible in Europe* and other historical works.

First as to this "darkness" which lay upon the

world before the coming of Christ. It is, of course, a general truth that humanity grows wiser and better as it grows older. There is moral and intellectual, as well as biological and political, evolution. Hence we should, on general principles, expect a later civilisation, which builds upon the experience of its predecessors, to be in many respects superior to them. If Europe had *not* improved upon the blunders of its predecessors, the old empires and civilisations, we should have to say that its religion must have had a singularly paralysing effect upon it. If there has been progress, there is a very good ground for this quite apart from religion.

But it will easily be perceived that this general truth is open to modification. One civilisation improves upon the errors of its predecessors only if it knows them accurately. This is precisely what did not happen in Europe until modern times. Until after the Reformation, or at least the Renaissance, history was as crude and inaccurate as science. For a thousand years after the establishment in Europe of the new religion more than ninety per cent. of the population were illiterate and densely ignorant, and the historical ideas of the few scholars were weird. The history of the older world was generally taken from the Old Testament, which is in this respect grotesquely inaccurate. From the thirteenth century onward more attention was paid to what survived of Roman and Greek literature, and the sceptical scholars of the Renaissance fully vindicated the splendour of Rome and Athens. This generosity was, however, checked by the Reformation, and the old fairy-tales about the ancient

empires were restored. Moreover, even the Greek historians are very inaccurate when they speak about ancient Egypt or Babylonia. History, as a science, did not exist before Hume and Gibbon. Since then it has made stupendous progress and collected a vast amount of new information (by search in the old ruins, unpublished documents, etc.); and what it tells us is in deadly opposition to the Christian legend of the history of civilisation.

The history of the world before Christ must be dismissed briefly. The old idea was that the nations were all polytheistic and very vicious, except that in Judæa, which God was preparing for the Christian revelation, a glimmer of dawn led to the establishment of monotheism and of a high moral idealism. This is preposterous. We now have an ample knowledge of the ancient civilisations of Egypt, Babylonia, Assyria, and Persia, and from the remains we have discovered we see that monotheism was recognised by the thoughtful few long before the earliest Hebrew literature began, and—what is more important—a moral idealism similar to our own was cultivated. Egyptian moral literature of five thousand years ago is as sound as a modern code. Babylonian prayers and hymns, found in the ruins of the temples, reveal the same code. The book of laws of King Hammurabi, dating about 2100 B.C., is based upon a strict conception of justice. Of Persia we have the complete sacred book, the Avesta, and we find in it a moral code like that of the New Testament, which was partly founded upon it. Judæa, in other words, was a little upstart civilisation of the

first millennium before Christ, which learned the elements of civilised morality from empires that were already thousands of years old.

In discussing this point the clergy are apt to narrow the meaning of "morality" to sex-morality. This unfortunate tendency of the Christian system, founded upon ascetic ideas which are now generally abandoned, has had the effect in Europe (as we shall see) of obscuring the great principles of social morality and delaying the triumph of justice, truthfulness, and collective integrity. But it is quite a mistake to suppose that the old Empires differed from us, either in ideals or practices, in regard to sex-morality. The literature we have recovered from the ruins lays just the same stress on "purity" as Christian literature does. The soul of the Egyptian was severely judged after death in regard to purity as well as the other virtues. The Babylonian feared punishment in *this* world (which is more effective) if he transgressed the will of the gods in that regard. We have been much misled by the statement of a Greek historian that women prostituted themselves in the temples of Babylon. In many temples of Syria, and possibly some provincial temples of Babylonia, this ancient and much-misunderstood practice prevailed, but not in Babylon. All the Babylonian literature we possess shows that the moral code laid great stress on purity.

What proportion there was of *violation* of the moral code in these ancient civilisations we cannot say. The law restricting sex-intercourse has been habitually violated in all ages and all nations; as

it is in modern England, in town and country. It is, perhaps, unfair to compare these older peoples with quite modern Europe. Since the beginning of the nineteenth century there has been a great moral improvement in Europe. As religion has decayed in the same proportion we cannot attribute this to Christianity. We shall see that it is due to quite other causes. The proper thing to do is to compare Egypt or Babylonia with Europe as it was a hundred years ago, after more than a thousand years of Christian teaching. We have certainly not the slightest documentary reason to assert that the ancient Babylonians, Assyrians, Egyptians, Persians, Greeks, or Romans were less moral in practice, as a body, than Englishmen were until recent times.

In regard to Greece and Rome in particular the old exaggerations have been fully discredited by modern scholarship. For Athens I would recommend the serious inquirer to read the Rev. Professor Mahaffy's *Social Life in Greece* (a layman would make an even more complete vindication), and for Rome the works of that other Irish Protestant scholar Sir Samuel Dill. In several of my books I have shown that these learned studies are even below the truth, but they will suffice. The average Roman and Greek pagans were in moral respects very like ourselves. The sweeping charges of vice which are sometimes made are gross exaggerations of particular, and often not reliable, statements.

Then, as I explained in the second chapter of this section, there arose in all parts of the world, some centuries before Christ, what is called a higher

or select morality. The Pythagoreans in Greece (and to some extent Plato and Socrates and Zeno), the Essenes in Judæa, the Buddhists in Asia, the Zoroastrians in Persia, the Serapians in Asia Minor and Egypt, preached a very ascetic morality, like that of the Gospels. One may appreciate the refinement of feeling that inspires these special codes of conduct, yet regard them as more or less mischievous because they run to excess and are unfitted for general social guidance. In most cases the men who took them seriously retired into something like monastic settlements; as monks and nuns would do later in Christendom, though we have no evidence that these pagan communities were corrupted as the medieval monasteries and nunneries were.

However that may be, we now put Christianity in its proper historical perspective. Two thousand years ago there was a great ferment of what is called the higher or more spiritual morality. I do not admire it—regarding social conduct and happiness as more important—but I speak here simply as an historian. Several moralists, like Apollonius, Plutarch, Musonius, and Epictetus, pressed this ascetic ideal about the same time as Christ in the Roman world. Several sects were founded upon it. Egypt produced the sects of Isis and Serapis (adopted from Asia Minor); Persia produced the Manichæan and Mithraic cults; Judæa produced the Essenes and the Christians—if they are not one sect in origin, as I believe. All these agreed in their general moral features, and all spread over the Roman world with a great zeal for proselytism.



The next step in the reconstruction of history is to find how it was that Christianity outstripped the others and became the religion of Europe. The current Christian version is well known. It was a spiritual and religious triumph. The vicious pagans saw the beauty and purity of the new religion, and embraced it. In spite of repeated and bloody repressions, in spite of its own meekness and humility, the Christian faith triumphed over all obstacles and won the heart of Europe.

This is an appalling travesty of the historical facts. Christianity was not so much a rival of the old Roman and Greek gods as of Mithraism and the other Asiatic sects. The Roman Empire had a fine system of education, and the general literacy of the people and the cosmopolitan intercourse undermined the old belief in Jupiter and Venus and their tawdry adventures. There was a widespread disposition to embrace new religions. The frivolous and unascetic mass turned to sensual religions like the cult of Cybele. The refined few, while officially recognising the State-religion, turned to the Mithraic, Stoic, Manichæan, Isidean, or Christian cults. Vice had nothing to do with the change. In fine, Mithraism, as far as we can see, made more rapid progress than its chief rival, Christianity.

The persecutions of the Christian religion have been very greatly exaggerated. Modern historians, carefully examining the authentic documents, conclude that there was only one general persecution (under Diocletian, who was greatly provoked by the Christians) and four or five local persecutions, besides sporadic and limited outbreaks. It is

calculated that between two and three thousand Christians may have been put to death in three hundred years. The current belief in larger and more constant persecution is based upon a mass of forgeries, as is now widely recognised by Christian historians. Early Christian writers composed a large number of spurious lives (*Acta*) of saints and martyrs, and these are so recklessly written that the forgery is patent. Even older Catholic scholars like the Benedictine editors of the Migne collection of early Christian works recognised this, though the Roman "breviary" still contains scores of lives of saints and martyrs which are admittedly false.

How this enormous mass of pious forgeries came to be written, and a quite untrue version of history was imposed upon Europe, will soon become apparent. First let us deal with what is called "the triumph of Christianity."

Many attempts have been made to calculate what progress Christianity made in the Roman world by peaceful and more or less spiritual methods. It is generally estimated that something between two and ten per cent. of the entire Roman-Oriental empire had embraced Christianity by the beginning of the fourth century. In an age of religious decay and intense proselytism this would not be remarkable. Many scholars hold that the Mithraic religion made even greater progress than its rival, but we have not the same documentary evidence about Mithraism as we have about Christianity. There is, however, good reason to regard the estimate as excessive, as I will show in the case of Rome.

One of the most laborious calculations of the

number of Christians in the Roman Empire before political influence was used in its favour is found in V. Schultze's *Geschichte des Untergangs des Griechisch-römischen Heidenthums*. Schultze, who is a Christian and therefore disposed to be optimistic, comes to the conclusion that in its first three centuries, when it enjoyed no political influence, the new religion converted about one tenth of the Roman world, and ten millions out of a hundred millions. The Roman Empire then stretched, it must be remembered, from the forests of central Germany and the north of Britain to the deserts of Syria and the ruins of Mesopotamia. Schultze admits that these millions of Christians were overwhelmingly Asiatic, and that little progress had been made in Europe. But his calculation is made up by a very optimistic use of very vague indications, and if I show that in one important instance he is at least a hundred per cent. above the truth, we shall realise how misleading these calculations are.

There is a definite indication of the state of the Christian Church in Rome about the beginning of the third century. In the *Ecclesiastical History* of Eusebius (VI, 43) there is preserved a letter of the Bishop of Rome at that time, Cornelius, and he states that his church then had 44 presbyters (or priests), 14 deacons and subdeacons, and 94 clerics in what are called "minor orders." In the Church of Rome to-day every youth who takes "minor orders" intends to become a priest, but that was not the case in the early Church, so that the crowd of lesser clerics has not the same significance as it would now have. Let us take the 44 priests.

From this number Schultze concludes that the Christians of Rome must then have numbered 100,000. The total population of the city must have been at least a million, so that the Christians would form one tenth of the whole. It is by these means that Schultze gets his ten million Christians for the entire Empire.

But a more learned Christian historian than Schultze, the famous Dr. Döllinger, concluded from the letter of Bishop Cornelius that the Roman Christians numbered only 50,000, so that Schultze's total (which is made up of similar items) becomes at once extremely precarious. Gibbon also estimated the number at 50,000.

Yet even this figure seems to be more than double the truth. In modern times there is, on the average, one priest to about a thousand "souls," and it will easily be realised, when we recall the conditions of the Roman Church in the third century, that the proportion of followers to clergy must then have been far less than it is now. There was at that time not a single public Christian chapel at Rome. The first—a small restaurant in a poor quarter which was converted into a church—was opened long afterwards. Moreover, the language of the Church at Rome in the third century was Greek. It was out of touch with the mass of the people. It is therefore quite absurd to imagine each of these 44 priests with a large congregation of 2,500 people. In the historical conditions it is more probable that there were a few hundred followers to each priest, or a total Christian population of not more than 20,000.

Schultze stresses the fact that the Roman Church

supported 1,500 poor members, widows, etc. Again he and other writers forget, or are ignorant of, the historical conditions. Hundreds of thousands of the Roman citizens lived on free rations, distributed by the municipal authorities, and the Church would have to compete with the pagans by supporting a very heavy proportion of its followers. From every point of view 20,000 seems to be a generous estimate of the number of the Roman Christians. I trust some day to publish a close inquiry into the real proportion of Christians before Constantine. Gibbon and other historians who have made some calculation are unfamiliar with ecclesiastical matters, and have been too generous in their estimates. They, as a rule, infer that so many bishops mean a very large number of Christians, whereas in the early Church a provincial bishop may have had at times only a few hundred followers. St. Augustine himself had a very small Christian body to superintend. All these calculations need revision. Probably there were by the beginning of the fourth century not 100,000 Christians in the whole of Europe, apart from Greece, and not more than a million in the entire Empire.

This was the outcome of two and a half centuries of proselytism. It was a result comparable with the efforts of the other Asiatic sects which overran the Empire, and conveys not the slightest suggestion of "miracle." Christianity succeeded, like Mithraism and Manichæanism, in detaching hundreds of thousands from the old pagan religions because those older religions were openly childish. Educated men, however, embraced either the Stoic philosophy or some refined monotheism, and, in

Europe, rarely turned to Christianity. The Church in Italy produced only one scholar in three centuries; and Italy was then the centre of civilisation.

This was the situation at the beginning of the fourth century. The overwhelming majority of Europeans were still deaf to the Christian gospel, and the general persecution under the Emperor Diocletian (303-11) wrought havoc among the faithful. It is calculated that about 2,000 of them suffered death in the entire Empire. It is known that vast numbers abjured their faith. It was a shrunk and demoralised Church that entered upon the second decade of the fourth century, nearly three hundred years after the death of Christ.

Then it was that the real "triumph" of Christianity began. Within one hundred years it was the only religion recognised by the State; a very little later it was, apart from a few secret sceptics and stealthy gatherings of pagans, Manichæans, etc., the only religion in the Roman Empire. It ought not to be necessary at this date to observe that this triumph was purely political. A score of distinguished historians of the nineteenth century have written special treatises on the subject, and any history of the fourth century now includes the essential facts. Christianity was imposed by force upon a reluctant civilisation. Its religious rivals were bloodily and ruthlessly suppressed. About these points there is no historicial dispute.

The change began with the conversion to Christianity of the Emperor Constantine. What the conversion of the Emperor, who was a vicious and

violent man, abhorred by Rome for the murder of his son and daughter, precisely meant no historian has yet succeeded in making clear. But he professed the Christian faith, and the sun now shone upon the new religion. Favour and wealth took the place of persecution, and "conversions" became numerous. As a Roman orator said, it became "a new form of ambition to desert the [pagan] altars." Constantine and his successors, who were hardly superior to him in virtue, were compelled still to tolerate other religions, but in the course of the century the sceptre fell to weak or fanatical men, while the interest of the Church passed to able and powerful men like Ambrose of Milan. The persecution of the other religions began. We have still the series of drastic imperial decrees which were issued between 381 and 391, and we have, especially in the east, records of the zeal with which the Christians fired and wrecked the temples of the rival religions. Before the end of the fourth century every non-Christian temple in the Empire was destroyed or sealed by the authorities, and the practice of any other religion was forbidden under dire penalties. For the more obstinate there was the penalty of death. In riots, religious faction-fights, and executions there were at least ten times as many done to death in the name of religion within that century as there had been Christians executed in the previous three centuries. Such was the "spiritual" triumph of Christianity in Europe.

But the effect upon civilisation of this victory has been just as falsely misrepresented as the victory itself, although here again the facts are common

historical property. The clerical writer enlarges upon the circle of virtuous women which met under the guidance of St. Jerome at Rome, but he does not add that St. Jerome himself, in his letters, represents these dozen women as a few chosen souls living amongst a corrupt clergy and laity ; nor does he tell that at the election of Jerome's friend, Pope Damasus, a wily and worldly priest, in the year 366, a hundred and sixty Christians were slain by their fellow-Christians, and the murderous riots ran on for days. In the east these bloody intestine struggles had commenced long before, and in the contest of Unitarian and Trinitarian thousands lost their lives. Vice and violence stain the whole of the chronicles of the period.

With the complete establishment of Christianity as the sole religion things became worse. The Roman Empire was destroyed and overrun by the barbarians of the north, and the progress of civilisation was suspended for a thousand years. Let us make every allowance for this confusion. Let us not even inquire how it was that Mohammedanism could raise the equally rude tribes of the desert to a brilliant civilisation in less than two centuries, while the Christian Church suffered the barbarians of Europe to remain in gross vice and profound illiteracy for four or five times that period. But at least let us face the facts. After the fourth century, after the official imposition of Christianity upon Europe, the world sank steadily to the appalling ignorance and degradation of the early Middle Ages. Every chronicler after the fourth century tells the same story, and the English reader will find



the truth sadly confessed in Dean Milman's *History of Latin Christianity*. The contention that Europe improved after it became Christian is as flagrant a perversion of the historical facts as one can conceive.

The chief condition of gross vice and violence is ignorance, and there never was within the limits of civilisation such dense ignorance as now fell upon Europe. The Roman Empire had had so comprehensive a system of schools that practically every free citizen, and a large proportion of the slaves, had received an elementary education. Higher education also was subsidised by the State. This system was not restored until the "materialistic" nineteenth century. Clerical writers speak of schools here and schools there; just as, ignoring the general vice and violence, they ask us to think that a saint or saintly monastery here and there redeems the Church. Let them explain the fact that until the nineteenth century something more than ninety per cent. of Europe remained totally illiterate, and the percentage of illiteracy remains highest where the clergy are most powerful (Russia, South Italy, Spain, the Balkans, South and Central America).

And not only is the dense night of the Middle Ages not abolished because there was a little camp of scholarship (of a kind) here and there. The concentration of what learning there was in the hands of clerics led to a train of terrible abuses. First the real history of the "conversion" of Europe was falsified. During the sixth, seventh, and eighth centuries were fabricated those hundreds of spurious lives of saints and martyrs to which I

have already referred. Relics were invented for these legendary heroes, and from the fourth century onward this trade in dead bones became an orgy. Duplicates and triplicates were made when a relic was very popular. There were several wedding-rings of the Virgin, several heads of John the Baptist, and so on. The Jews and Greeks and (later) the cynical Turks swamped Europe with spurious and sordid relics; including the linen of the Virgin and of the infant Jesus, milk and hair of the Virgin, and even the navel-cord of her son. I will give only one instance, as it belongs to the most enlightened period before modern times, the Renaissance, and is recorded by the chief Roman historians of the time. In 1492 the Sultan sent to the Pope "the spear with which Longinus had pierced the side of Christ on the cross." The German and French cardinals angrily protested that this spear already existed in Europe. There were, in fact, already two spurious spears—one at Paris and one at Nuremberg. Yet the Vatican authorities solemnly received the third spurious spear and exposed it among the treasures of Rome! The churches of Rome were packed with these profitable puerilities.

But Rome went further. Not content with the religious control of Europe, it aimed at material power and an absolute tyranny of the Papacy. For this purpose the weapon of forgery was, as I have previously said, freely used. Two documents, known as *The Donation of Constantine* and *The Acts of St. Silvester*, were entirely fabricated in the interest of the Papacy, and other documents were

altered, enlarged, or (when inconsistent with the Papal theory) suppressed. Döllinger (*The Papacy*, Ch. II, § 2) has shown that under Gregory VII (Hildebrand), one of the most religious and most ambitious of the Popes, the most devout servants of the Papacy engaged in this work. The well-known work which is generally called *The False Decretals* was not composed in Italy or in the interest of the Papacy; though the Popes gladly availed themselves of this mass of forgeries and perversions of history. But in the eleventh century, when Hildebrand was completing the despotism of the Papacy, the work was continued by such recognised friends and servants of the Pope as Bishop Anselm of Lucca, Bishop Bonizo, Bishop Gregory of Pavia, and Cardinal Deusdedit. The powers and claims of the Popes to-day rest upon a mass of exposed forgeries. The whole early history of Christendom was grossly falsified.

Yet the attainment of despotic power by Rome led to no moral improvement. The power was used in the interest and for the enrichment of the Papacy, which once more passed into a period of deep corruption. In the tenth century, the "Iron Age," the most revolting scenes had been witnessed at Rome. In the fourteenth century the Papacy again degenerated, and this degeneration culminated, in the fifteenth century, in the complete degradation of the Papal court and the open licence of some of the Popes and many of the cardinals. Catholic writers who press upon our consideration the splendid art of the Middle Ages omit to state that it was precisely during this period of cynical

scepticism and open vice that the great artists of the Roman school flourished. When the Reformers compelled the Papacy to put its house in order, this wonderful art withered at once as if its roots had been cut.

It is impossible here to enter further into the condition of Europe during that long period of Christian domination. As late as the seventeenth century the general grossness, violence, and ignorance were amazing. It is sheer mockery to ask us to regard a few saints, a few schools, a few superb cathedrals, as redeeming this general degradation. Sexual freedom, in particular, was, to say the least, as great as we find it at any period in the older civilisations. Probably this general standard of conduct had never before been so low in a civilised community. Injustice to women and workers was profound and unrebuked. Duelling was universal, murder was habitual, and war was unspeakably barbarous. But it will be enough to consider, as we shall consider in the last section, what the social state of Europe was when the modern period opened, after fifteen centuries of clerical power, and how the modern fight for freedom, justice, and enlightenment has proceeded. I have sufficiently shown how modern history has shattered the clerical version of the development of Europe. Christianity found Europe in a state of high civilisation and literacy; it was imposed upon Europe by force; and Europe then, from whatever cause, rapidly sank into grossness and dense ignorance, from which it has been rescued by modern humanism. That is the verdict of history.

# SECTION III

## THE VERDICT OF PHILOSOPHY

### CHAPTER I

#### THE REVOLT OF PHILOSOPHY

UP to the present we have considered only what many of the advanced Christian writers of our day would call the old outer defences of Christianity. On a famous occasion, when liberal and illiberal divines of the Church of England were belabouring each other, the Archbishop of York, who rose to make peace, made use of this military figure. There were those, he said, who courageously refused to believe that the familiar outlying works of the Church were indefensible, and they still manned the heavily assaulted forts. There were those, on the other hand, who thought it better to abandon the old positions—the venerable fortress of *Genesis*, the prophecies of the Old Testament, even the miracles of the New Testament—and retire upon “the citadel,” the fundamental doctrines of Christianity. The Church, he conveyed, blessed both divisions of its heroic defenders.

The figure of speech is picturesque, but it is found, when you press it, to be difficult of application. When invaders have occupied the first and second line of forts, they do not, as a rule, mingle

with and smile at a handful of defenders who stubbornly remain; as scientific men and historians smile at the clergy who still speak of *Genesis* as "a matchless revelation," and oppose evolution, and defend the Gadarene swine or the "miraculous" triumph of Christianity. Further, the Christian believers are not in the least distributed as is an army which defends a threatened city. It is very far from true that the majority have abandoned the antiquated outer positions. The majority, both of clergy and laity, are still found in those old positions, as I have shown in the preceding chapters. Sunday after Sunday they fire their innocent pop-guns at evolutionists, Higher Critics, and historians; or they are naively ignorant that the positions they valiantly defend were handed over to the enemy long ago. It is a situation of incomparable confusion.

Moreover, when we desire to meet the educated clergyman or believer, to study his enlightened retirement upon the "fundamentals" of Christianity, we encounter as grave a confusion as ever. The bulk of our scholars to-day avoid the problem, and do not, apparently, give any thought to Christianity. What *are* these "fundamentals" which have not been affected by the advance of modern culture? The overwhelming majority of Christians would say at once that the really vital and essential doctrines are the Incarnation, the Atonement, and the Resurrection. The outer ring of positions may be defensible yet not essential to the survival of Christianity, but how is Christianity to be sharply distinguished from Buddhism

or any great ethical religion if these three characteristic doctrines are abandoned? It would be "Hamlet," not merely without the ghost, but without the Prince of Denmark.

Yet I have shown, and will further show in this section, that these doctrines are widely abandoned by theologians themselves, and are rejected by the overwhelming majority of the lay scholars of the world. A very considerable body of divines in every country frankly surrender them. It is little use to say that some of them believe in a sort of figurative or "re-interpreted" Incarnation and Atonement. I am speaking of the Atonement and Incarnation as taught by Christian leaders and Churches from St. Paul onward. A very large and increasing number of the educated clergy reject them; a still larger number reject the miraculous birth and the Resurrection. I have seen a body of innocent Christian artisans open their eyes in bewilderment and anger when I read to them the published opinions of a score of German, English, and American divines on these doctrines. As to the more learned of our laity, in every branch of culture, not one in twelve, at least, of our living scholars has ever expressed a belief in them.

I have repeatedly, in the course of the debates which sometimes follow lectures, asked my Christian hearers for the names of six living Englishmen of high intellectual distinction who accept these supposed fundamental teachings of Christianity. I have never received them. Some members of my audience attempted to turn the point by observing glibly that there were no men of great

intellectual distinction in England to-day. We are, in my own opinion, living in an age that is singularly poor in genius, but this evasion does not weaken my point. Take the hundred most distinguished men in England to-day—in science, art, letters, history, or philosophy—and name six of them who accept the Incarnation, Atonement, and Resurrection. You cannot. And the simple believer, with little leisure to read and still less training to judge, who fancies that this general disbelief among our cultural leaders has no lesson for him must have a very cynical idea of the value of evidence.

What, then, do these advanced believers regard as “the fundamentals” of Christianity? In the third chapter of this section I will review the opinions of many of them. Here I ought to attempt to give a brief statement of their position. In point of fact, however, this is almost impossible. They still differ considerably from each other, and they love long and involved explanations which it is impossible to compress into a plain statement. Some think that the essence of Christianity is the superb model of manhood embodied in the Gospel-story of Christ. But we saw that, as many of these divines admit, the Gospel-story is late and unreliable. Some think this story, the peculiar possession of Christians, so elevated that it is worthy to be the moral foundation of a religion whether or no it is historically true. But fiction can never be a real human inspiration, nor do these divines give much evidence that they have ever seriously and critically compared the life of Christ



with that of Buddha and other ancient moralists. Some say that the Christian ethic is so fine, and has done so much for Europe, that this is enough of itself to be the essence of a distinct religion. But we have seen that the Christian ethic is not different from the ethic of the other new religions of the Roman world, or the ethic of the Platonists or the Stoics; and we have seen that the second part of this position is historically false.

The truth is that Christian scholarship is drifting more and more toward an entire surrender of all that is distinctive of Christianity, and is merging into a cosmopolitan higher religion. From the plain signs of the times we gather that the various branches of the Christian Church (except the Roman Catholic—the Prussians of the Christian world) will sooner or later re-unite in one body. From more subtle indications, which are found in the essays and works of the more cultured Christian writers of our time, we gather that the next step will be a re-union of all the higher religions of the world in a common defence against the spreading irreligion.

It will be a dramatic culmination of religious development. The student of comparative religions traces the continual branching of the sectarian tree throughout the ages. What wars, what massacres, what bloody persecutions, what fierce hatreds and oppressions the rivalry has inspired! The ground of history is red with the blood of martyrs; the blood of early Christians shed by Romans, and then the streams of blood of heretics, schismatics, and pagans shed by

Christians, the blood shed by the early Moham-medans, the blood of Albigensians and Jews and victims of the Inquisition, the blood of furiously antagonistic Catholics and Protestants. The blood of millions of men and women. And in the end we fall upon each other's necks and embrace; and we agree at least in one thing—that a supremely intelligent and benevolent being guided this remarkable evolution! No wonder that our scholars, as a body, are singularly indifferent about religion, and confine themselves to their sciences and arts.

In this retreat upon a fundamental religious position believers will say that, if science and history have pitilessly harassed them, philosophy at least has been faithful. The cry is that “materialism” threatens the world, and religion—not so much any particular religion, but religion—alone can save it. In this religion has generally the support of philosophers, who scorn “materialism.” Practically all philosophy is spiritualistic. When Haeckel wrote his *Riddle of the Universe*, and it passed into twenty languages and sold at least a million copies, it was the philosophers who were mobilised to “heckle Haeckel” and “riddle the *Riddle*,” as clerical pamphleteers jocosely put it. We have here to see the precise meaning of this alleged support of religion by philosophy.

What philosophy exactly is it is difficult to say in a few words. I was at one time a professor of that exalted branch of culture, and even at that time I found it impossible to explain to a non-philosophical inquirer the nature of this mysterious teaching I conveyed to my pupils. Philosophy,

which once embraced logic, metaphysics, and ethics, is now synonymous with metaphysics; which Sir E. Ray Lankester describes as "a blind man in a dark room hunting for a black cat which is not there." That is one of many scientific definitions of philosophy. There is no love between men of science and metaphysicians. In so far as one can give a real definition of this austere branch of learning, which is so flippantly persecuted, it is an attempt to study reality as a whole—while science, history, etc., study particular aspects of it—by means of very abstract processes of the intellect. But its nature, and its bearing on religion, will become much clearer if we consider it historically. As in the previous chapters, I do not go farther back than is necessary.

Leaving out of consideration ancient Greece and Rome, learning in Europe (such as it was) formed until about the thirteenth century a disorderly heap of scraps of knowledge and fiction, and was almost entirely in the hands of clerics. Philosophy was not separate from theology. The theologian made a statement—about devils, angels, gods, comets, etc.—and then proved it from the Scriptures, the Fathers, and "reason." Reason was the Cinderella of the family of witnesses to the truth. But when a great Mohammedan civilisation arose in Spain, and challenged the Christian, to which it was immensely superior, a change became necessary. Since the Mohammedans did not accept the New Testament or the Fathers, it was necessary to build up a body of proof on reason alone. So the greatest of the Schoolmen, Thomas Aquinas, wrote

a "Philosophical Summa" (or encyclopædia) as well as a "Theological Summa." Philosophy was born again as a distinct branch of learning. But it was, the theologians said, and still say, "the maid-servant of theology." We have to trace the revolt of the servant.

At the Renaissance, when Greek learning was revived, the independence of philosophy was emphatically asserted, and some went so far as to deny the immortality of the soul. However, the Reformation put an end to this development, as I said, and such philosophy as there was in Europe continued to be the "hand-maid" of theology. Its chief function was to prove the existence and attributes of God and the immortality of the soul. On this foundation the divine would then rear his Christian structure.

But though the Reformers were as bitter as the Romanists against the new Humanism which had been born in Europe, the spirit of the Renaissance lived on. We saw this, especially, in the second chapter of the last section. Deism and Unitarianism made progress amongst educated men; and the Deists, like the Mohammedans, rejected the Scriptures and the Fathers. One had to meet them on the ground of reason, or philosophy. Indeed, the Deists themselves had essentially to rely upon philosophy. They accepted the existence of a personal God and, generally, the immortality of the soul. Since the testimony of the Scriptures was rejected by them, these doctrines had to be proved by philosophical arguments. There was a great zeal for "natural religion";

that is to say, belief in God and the soul detached from a belief in revelation or Christianity. The development of thought was not unlike that which had been witnessed in ancient Greece, when the received religion decayed, and a brisk philosophical activity was bound to follow.

Incidentally it is interesting to notice that this early zeal for a "natural religion" was furiously denounced by the clergy. The Deists were "infidels" or "unbelievers." Such abuse was heaped upon them, and still lingers in theological literature, that some of the latest and best-known representatives of the school, such as Voltaire and Thomas Paine, are believed by large numbers of clergy and laity to have been atheists! Now that the most refined and learned of our theologians are coming to the same position, fundamentally, it is interesting to look back on the rich vituperation that was poured upon these "infidels" of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The reasoning of the new philosophers, however, very quickly departed from the accepted lines of Christian philosophy. Take, for instance, the leading thinkers of the seventeenth century: Hobbes, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibnitz, Malebranche, and Locke. A complete account of their views may be read in any history of philosophy. Here I have merely to indicate, in plain language, how they began the liberation of philosophy from its bondage to theology.

Hobbes, it is notorious, speculated, not only independently of, but in open antagonism to, the Churches. He lived in an age when the sceptic

had to be discreet, and he is more religious in his conclusions, or assertions of belief, than in his reasoning. But what he did write of a philosophical nature was of so pronouncedly materialistic a tendency that some have doubted if his profession of theism was sincere. His French contemporary, Descartes, also was diverted by the growing science of the time from the traditional paths of religious philosophy. He regarded animal life as the outcome of a purely mechanical structure, and held that the human soul was lodged, like a mathematical point, in the centre of the brain. On the other hand, he rejected the doctrine of a direct creation of the world, and he put forward a scheme of evolution which was, for his time, remarkably ingenious. Even in discussing the existence of God he invented so original a method of reasoning, and cast such discredit upon the current religious arguments, that his system was held to be a dangerous source of scepticism. For him philosophy was not so much the hand-maid as the collaborator of theology. He raised its dignity and increased its independence. And the same may be said of the French priest Malebranche and the German philosopher Leibnitz. They were quite orthodox in their substantial conclusions, but their systems were dangerously original and independent.

This revolt was more marked in the case of the other two leading thinkers of the seventeenth century. Spinoza and Locke were born in the same year (1632), and they opened entirely new and very heterodox avenues of thought. Spinoza

became a Pantheist, and this doctrine of the identification of God and nature seemed at the time little short of atheism. To the Christian idea of a God living for an eternity before he created the world the doctrine of Spinoza was essentially opposed. Locke, on the other hand, disturbed the very bases of philosophy, in so far as it served the purposes of religion, by laying down what is called "the empirical principle"; we know nothing except through experience, or "There is nothing in the mind that has not passed through the doors of the senses." On this principle of knowledge man seems to be, by his very nature, confined to a knowledge of material things. Locke himself, by not very convincing departures from his own principle, avoided this conclusion, and professed to furnish indisputable proof of the existence of God. He, in fact, accepted the Christian revelation. But his principle proved more lasting than his conclusions, and it became the direct source of the philosophical Agnosticism of a later generation.

When we pass to the eighteenth century we find these earlier speculations leading to the establishment of definite schools of philosophy, or groups (or series) of like-minded thinkers. Most of them were, at least as regards the fundamentals of religion, orthodox in their conclusions, but they entirely won that independence of philosophy which would lead to more sceptical developments. Their methods also were so varied and contradictory that scepticism about the power of the mind to investigate and establish the truths of

religion was greatly encouraged. While, for instance, the famous Bishop Berkeley put forward an idealist system, which seemed to dissolve the material universe into an illusion, the "Scottish school," setting up "common sense" as the criterion, came back in the direction of traditional philosophy. One group of French thinkers, who were quite orthodox, pressed the moral that human reason was incapable of solving these high problems; the existence of God and the immortality of the soul are, they said, known only by "tradition" or accepted on faith.

On the other hand, the empirical principle which Locke had put forward led to the two systems which have become more familiar to us as Agnosticism and Materialism. Hume boldly blended the empiricism of Locke with the idealism of Berkeley. As Huxley would put it at a later date, we know only our states of consciousness, and cannot justly infer that there is a substance or reality, either spiritual or material, beyond them. In that case we not only do not know, but cannot know, if there is a God or if the soul is immortal. To avoid misunderstanding, however, let me add that this dogmatic position is not adopted by the modern Agnostic. His attitude is simply that he is without a belief in God or immortality because the evidence offered to him has not convinced him.

In the more resolute and logical mind of some of the French heretics the empirical principle led to Materialism. Most of the great French anti-Christian writers of the eighteenth century, notably Voltaire and Rousseau, believed in God. But



there were at the time several distinguished and learned writers who drew the conclusion that a material world alone is recorded or reflected in our experience because matter alone exists. The idea of spirit was discarded as a fiction of the older philosophers and of religion. Materialism of this extreme or dogmatic kind is, however, a rare type of philosophy. Most men are withheld from making the positive assertion that spirit does not exist because we cannot prove a negative. References in religious works to "dogmatic Materialists"—and works like those of Sir O. Lodge abound in such references—are little better than nonsense, though not quite so innocent. I am not aware of any thinker or scientist of our time who ventures upon this dogmatic denial of the existence of spirit. The general attitude is a matter-of-fact Agnosticism, which is in many cases united with a feeling, based upon the trend of scientific inquiry, that everything *within our actual experience* may turn out to be material.

The earthquake of the French Revolution and of the Napoleonic war did not entirely check these streams of philosophical development. In France, indeed, materialism was, like everything that had threatened the joint dominion of Church and State, driven underground at the Restoration. In England the spirit of Locke and Hume still lived, and we trace its influence in the teaching of J. Mill, J. S. Mill, Huxley (who dabbled much in philosophy), and Herbert Spencer. Huxley, in particular, maintained Hume's paradoxical assertion that we know only our states of conscious-

ness, and therefore cannot give our adhesion to either spiritualism or materialism. J. S. Mill admitted in addition a vague something which he called "permanent possibilities of sensation." Spencer, as is known, magnificently arrayed all the scientific lore of his time round a central philosophic theory that matter and spirit are but two aspects of a reality which is itself unknown and unknowable.

But this empirical Agnosticism of English thinkers was, long before the middle of the century, challenged by a new and formidable type of spiritualist philosophy which was imported from Germany. In that country a great line of philosophers had risen, and with a brief notice of them I will close this chapter. It is hardly necessary to repeat that I am not attempting to give even the shortest account of these systems of thought. I touch only such aspects of them as illustrate the growing independence of philosophy and its relation, as an independent science, to religion.

The first of the illustrious line of modern German philosophers was Immanuel Kant. Kant's activity, as far as it concerns us here, was a drama in two acts. By his greatest work (*The Critique of Pure Reason*), which is still regarded as one of the most important contributions to philosophical literature, he seemed, like Hume, to destroy the whole basis of rational proof of religious beliefs, and to impose Agnosticism on all thoughtful people. He was concerned with the nature of knowledge, or of the mind; and he came to the conclusion that part of our knowledge was from without and part from

the mind itself. The mind received its perceptions from without, and proceeded to fit these into certain subjective moulds or "forms" and thus to create our ideas. It is enough to say that "causality" and "contingency" were included by Kant amongst these purely subjective forms of thought. It was usual to prove the existence of God from the fact that the world was "caused" and "contingent." If these were not real features of things, but products or conditions of the mind itself, all the current arguments for God and immortality were invalid.

But Kant went on, in his *Critique of Practical Reason* (or the moral sense), to restore the credit of religion. Heine caustically pictures the philosopher's aged servant entering his study and finding his idol (God) in ruins; and Kant, to stem the tears of his servant, puts together the broken fragments. The fact is that Kant had had a severe Puritanical education, and he clung to a mystic veneration for the moral law. It was an absolute command ("categorical imperative") laid upon man; and it was unintelligible unless we admitted a moral legislator, God, and a world beyond the grave in which it would be vindicated.

Kant has had an enormous influence on later thought, but it is not in the nature of philosophy to be constant. Before Kant died there arose another thinker, Fichte, who diverted a large number of the master's followers. Fichte rejected Kant's idea of a moral order which pointed to a personal God and personal immortality. He contended that God *was* the moral order of the uni-

verse, and he so blended God and man and nature in a great impersonal "self" that he was charged by divines with atheism. The next thinker of the series, Schelling, was more explicitly Pantheistic, in the manner of Spinoza. God, man, and nature—matter and spirit—were forms or aspects of one evolving reality.

Then came Hegel. Of Hegel's system Professor Masson used to say that, when it was introduced into England, men wondered as savages wonder when they first see an elephant and are uncertain which is the head and which is the tail. Probably Hegel's philosophy has drawn more wit from the uninitiated than any other system of thought, yet it has influenced European thought even more than Kant's system and has been accepted, in whole or part, by many distinguished English scholars. Assuredly there can be no question here of describing it. For my purpose it suffices to say that it left no room whatever for personal immortality—"Do you expect a tip for having nursed your ailing mother and refrained from poisoning your brother?" Hegel bitingly asked one who spoke to him of the Christian heaven—and it stripped God of every feature by which Christian worshippers might recognise their divinity. Thought and reality are, he said, one. The evolutionary process is a logical process. And this one evolving or thinking reality is the Absolute; which some liberal Christians, wearied by the successive blows of philosophers and scientists, were content to accept as all that remained of God.

Hegel's deification of thought or reason led to a

reaction. Schopenhauer entered the field with a theory that Will was the supreme reality, and the subjects of philosophy largely passed under a new dynasty. But Schopenhauer's Will had nothing whatever in common with the Christian God, and his pen dipped in gall whenever he had occasion to write of theology. He leaned rather to the atheistic fatalism of the pure Buddhists. By a further inevitable reaction the next thinker, E. von Hartmann, restored reason to equal rank with will, and set up as the supreme reality "The Unconscious," which becomes conscious in man, and must be saved by man from the crudities and tragedies into which it has evolved. And the series of thinkers ended—save for a revival of spiritual philosophy which will be considered in the next chapter—with the drastic critical work of Feuerbach, who tore to shreds the philosophic evidence for God and immortality, and dissolved all religion into a dream and illusion.

## CHAPTER II

### THE POSITION OF MODERN THINKERS

FROM this very brief account of the ideas of the leading philosophers of modern times the reader will have gathered that, however much theologians may speak of the fidelity of philosophy, it has in reality cast off its bondage and secured an independence which may in any decade turn to hostility. Modern philosophy was born under religious inspiration, not accidentally as art was, but from a rigorous necessity. The men of Europe were growing out of childhood. It no longer sufficed to bid them bow to the divine lash or receive the commands of the deity from his priestly representatives. It dawned upon men that messengers are at times impostors; that you must know that a remote monarch exists before you pay a fee to his representative. The Bible could not assure them of this. It presupposes the belief in God. And the time had come when the simple assurance of the clergy no longer produced an abject conviction.

Philosophy must precede theology in order of time. Reason precedes faith; so even the authoritative Church of Rome teaches. God and immortality must be proved by the use of reason, and all such reasoning belongs to the province of philosophy. Every rural curate who, when other topics fail, dazes his audience with triumphant proofs of

the existence of God is wearing some parody of the mantle of the philosopher.

The preceding chapter will, therefore, have made it plain how essential it is for us to glance at so abstruse a subject as philosophy even in such a work as this. It will also have made it plain that the supposed fidelity of philosophy is a singularly generous estimate of the real facts. Its development in modern times has given the clergy hardly less concern than the advance of science or history. At first philosophy was entirely in the hands of the clergy, and it assumed the form of a series of proofs, founded chiefly upon the reasoning either of Plato or Aristotle, of the existence of God and the immortality of the soul. This was the supreme purpose of philosophy.

But from the time when it passed into the hands of laymen its service to theology weakened. They shattered the old proofs, and even each other's proofs. They presented no longer a consistent body of evidence which might impress the unlearned. They vanished out of sight of the public in clouds of words which none but the initiate could penetrate. All that the public could understand was that some said there was a God, and some had their doubts; but the God even of the most fulsome of them was a being whom they could not recognise.

Further, the purpose of philosophy entirely changed. I have had to confine myself to the systems of these thinkers in so far as they still have reference to the fundamental religious beliefs. But if I had had space more fully to describe these systems, or if the reader cares to glance at the stern

pages of some history of philosophy, he will realise that, as time went on, the philosophers had less and less to say about religion. They have an increasing amount to say about the nature of time and space, and the nature of knowledge, but they have very little to say about God and almost nothing about immortality. Contemporary with the men I have mentioned there were always philosophers of a more orthodox type. But these men whom I have passed in review are the outstanding figures in any manual of the history of philosophy, and the tendency amongst them to restrict or eliminate the religious element is very conspicuous.

And this is the first feature one notices in the philosophic world of our time. Philosophy has been completely secularised. You might attend the lectures on philosophy for a whole year at any great modern university—at Oxford or Cambridge, at Columbia or Harvard, at Paris or Berlin—and you would hear no more about God and the soul than you would hear in the lectures on physiology. Ask the professor when he proposes to deal with those themes, which were at one time the central and vital issues of philosophy. He would probably tell you that they are totally irrelevant to his subject; he would refer you to the professor of theology in the next room. At times you might hear him discuss, historically, the Absolute of Hegel or the Unconscious of von Hartmann, but the immortality of the soul never. You might for this attend with some expectation the lectures on psychology, which means “the science of the soul.”



But you would find that the professor refrains from mentioning the soul as scrupulously as he refrains from mentioning tariff-reform or Home Rule. This is one way of measuring the "loyalty" of philosophy. It is in large part the verdict of philosophy.

But there is another side of the matter. Philosophy, as such, has nothing to say about any religious belief. Since there is no such thing as a consistent and accepted body of philosophical teaching, perhaps this will not surprise us. We must remember, however, that the complete disappearance of the consistent body of argumentation about God and immortality, which once existed in philosophy, is a fact of great significance. It would be of infinitely greater significance than the refutation of *Genesis* if the public knew anything about it. There is in the whole advance of culture no more serious blow at religion—not merely Christianity, but religion—than this splitting of philosophy, in so far as it retains any bearing at all on the question of God, into a score of vague, contradictory, and generally secular systems.

There is, however, as I said, one general feature of systems of philosophy, and it is on this side that philosophy comes into some sort of alliance with religion. Philosophers are never materialists, and they are almost always spiritualists. Many to-day are Agnostics; they have, they say, no more reason to pronounce between materialism and spiritualism than has the professor of paleontology or economics. Many hold that matter and spirit are, or may be, two different aspects of one reality. But certainly

the quite general belief is that the mind is "spiritual," and it is on this account that the philosophers are still regarded as auxiliaries of the theologian.

Let me, before I pass in review some of the modern representatives of philosophy, make one or two observations on this important point. Rationalists are weary of pointing out the elementary fallacy of this so-called struggle of materialism and spiritualism. One would imagine that the world is weary of listening to the discussion, yet, as I write, works still issue from the press—Harold Begbie's *Vindication of Britain*, for instance, or Sir O. Lodge's *Raymond*—which insist on the fallacy in all its crudeness.

For practical purposes it does not matter one jot whether you regard the mind as matter or spirit. Matter is defined as "substance possessing inertia and extension"; spirit as substance without those features. I fail even to imagine a kind of person who would decline to cultivate his mind or character unless it was devoid of "inertia and extension." The contention is ludicrous when it is put in precise language. To every race it matters vitally whether it cultivates, or ceases to cultivate, its mind and character and sentiments; and this has so little to do with the question whether or no the mind is spiritual that at least half the idealists of our time have not decided one way or the other. Materialism as a theory of the universe one can understand—though I know no writer of our time, outside the very imaginative pages of Sir O. Lodge's works, who professes it—but it has nothing to do with one's ideals of life. This wearisome cant about

“materialism” is like the “bogey” with which foolish parents terrify children.

The second observation I would make is that the belief of philosophers in the “spirituality” of mind need not impress us very much. There is nothing in the world about which we know less than the nature of consciousness. Dogmatism in such circumstances is not very convincing. The philosopher has a way of telling us that mental phenomena are “qualitative,” while material phenomena are “quantitative.” So, of course, they belong to different orders.

What do these terms mean? “Quantitative” is what you can measure, or express in mechanical formulæ. “Qualitative” is what you cannot so measure and express; but whether this incapacity is due to the present limitations of our knowledge, or whether it is due to the fact that mind *is really* of a different order, no man can say. We must wait and see. About the fourth or fifth millennium after Christ scientific men may have a complete mastery of that extraordinarily complex mechanism, the human brain. The question whether the mind is “spiritual” or not ought, logically, to be deferred until then. Until we know the brain we cannot say whether thought is or is not a function of it. Sir Oliver Lodge’s imaginary “dogmatic materialist” is as much out of place as—Sir Oliver Lodge, the dogmatic spiritualist.

It is the question of the *immortality* of the mind, indeed of the *personal* immortality of the mind, that matters. It may be said that if philosophers make the mind spiritual, they thereby make it

immortal, and so support religion. Not in the least. Remember that *matter* is immortal. The indestructibility of matter is one of the first principles of modern science. But your body is not immortal. The atoms which compose it, and are (within the limits of the new theory of matter) indestructible, enter at death into new combinations—melt away, as it were, into the universe. So one may hold that the mind is spiritual, yet that at death this spiritual thing will dissolve or merge into a spiritual world, and lose that individuality which you are so anxious to preserve. In point of fact this seems to be the general view of modern philosophers and psychologists. I will, at all events, pass in review a number of the representative writers of our time, and see how far they support, or decline to support, the religious beliefs which lie at the basis of the creeds. The majority of the professional philosophers of our time have never published any expression of belief or unbelief. That is itself a fact of great significance, since we know that the Churches have for years sought lay support wherever they could. However, I will examine the opinions of those philosophical writers who are generally quoted in religious literature as favourable.

The first of these is, of course, Professor Bergson. The distinguished metaphysician usually remains, at least as long as he lives, unknown to the general public. His achievements are not such as can be described by our journalists. Professor Bergson is a remarkable exception. His name is known, at least to the thoughtful public, over a large part of

the world. This is quite obviously because he is supposed to be a powerful ally of belief. Religious writers and preachers talk about "a swing of the pendulum"; a reaction in modern thought against "Victorian materialism" (which never existed). When you ask them where one finds the indications of this reaction, they haltingly mutter a few names like Lodge, Eucken, Bergson. . . . The rest is silence; but Bergson's name is pronounced very confidently. Well, the insincerity, the recklessness, of all this sort of talk will be realised, and the unsophisticated religious reader will be astounded, when I say that Professor Bergson has never expressed any belief whatever in God (any kind of God) or immortality.

Professor Bergson has shown himself an acute metaphysician in dealing with such questions as the nature of time. This is, of course, known to very few people. His general popularity is due to the fact that he has, for a philosopher, a style of rare charm, and that his works contain more science than metaphysics. His popularity in the religious world is, in turn, due to two circumstances. He is, in the first place, a strong opponent of Rationalism, since he holds that intuition (or instinct) is a more fitting implement of philosophical research than reason. From this there is scarcely another philosopher in the world who does not most emphatically dissent, and the believer who placed any real reliance upon this momentary fad would be guilty of folly.

In the second place, Professor Bergson is a strong opponent of materialism. Life and mind

are, he says, spiritual. He is best known to the general public by his work *Creative Evolution*, in which he describes the whole process of evolution as due to the inner working of an immaterial energy, a "vital impulse," which dominates and moulds matter. This is the full extent of his alliance with religion, and the weakness of his support may at once be pointed out. The question of the nature of life is one for biologists to discuss. In his latest work Sir Oliver Lodge very pompously remarks, in connection with the claim that life is mechanical: "There is not a physicist who thinks so" (*Raymond*, p. 286). Dust in the eyes of the ignorant, as usual. *Physicists* have nothing to do with the question. Nor have philosophers. The material from which we must devise an answer belongs to the biological sciences; and the weakness of Professor Bergson's position is that the far greater part of the leading biologists of the world are entirely opposed to him.

In any case, Professor Bergson gives no real assistance to religion, as it is conceived in this book. A man may make a kind of academic religion out of a belief in the existence of an impersonal God and a soul which survives death, though not in the form of a personality. With that I have no concern. I am speaking of religion as the mass of people conceive it. It will become a luxury of philosophers when it is reduced to a belief in an impersonal divine something and an immortality like that of the atoms of matter. Professor Bergson has never discussed these matters. It seems clear from his works that he does not believe in a personal God or personal immortality. The way

his name is used by religious writers is part of their generally unscrupulous practice.

Then there is Professor Eucken, of Jena University, whose name is always coupled with that of Bergson. Professor Eucken is a modern mystic; certainly a profound religious thinker. But in order to understand his significance we must carry a step further that development of German philosophy which I outlined in the last chapter.

The series of great thinkers, each contradicting the other (as is the invariable custom of philosophers), ended in confusion. There was, in the second part of the century, the school of Schopenhauer, which believed in a great, blind, struggling and unsuccessful "Will," and had not the least regard for personal dreams of immortality. There was the school of von Hartmann, which talked of man delivering God (the Unconscious), instead of God delivering man, and was still more clearly opposed to immortality. There was the school of Feuerbach, which destroyed the last shreds of deity and immortality. There was the school of Nietzsche, which fiercely opposed religious morality and the influence of Christianity as well as religious beliefs. Then there was a cry for a "return to Kant and Hegel," and a distinguished philosopher named Lotze tried to rally the scattered forces of spiritualism.

In passing let me give the reader another illustration of the scandalous way in which the public is mis-educated by religious writers. The period of confusion and supposed "materialism" in Germany corresponds to the middle of our Victorian

period; the age of Darwin, J. S. Mill, Spencer, Huxley, Tyndall, Lewes, and Clifford. Not one of these English writers called himself a materialist. Most of them emphatically disclaimed materialism. It was the same in Germany. Feuerbach, Molesehott, and Büchner were called materialists in spite of their own denials. Yet in the next generation the religious writers, led by Sir Oliver Lodge, jubilantly proclaimed that "Victorian materialism" (which they had manufactured), both in England and Germany, was dead, and there was a revival of spiritual philosophy.

Few can be ignorant that no such change occurred in England. There were at least quite as many religious scientists in the days of Huxley as there are now, and there are now at least quite as many Agnostic scientists as there were in the days of Huxley. But the case of Germany is even more amusing. Materialism was dead. Spiritualism was regaining its ground. Professor Haeckel (who expressly disowns materialism in the very books to which Sir O. Lodge refers when he represents him as the arch-materialist) was "a vessel stranded on the beach," "a voice crying in the wilderness." And suddenly, at the outbreak of war, our religious writers discovered that the whole evil was due to the power in Germany of this materialist philosophy (which had died forty years before) and to the loss of influence of the older spiritual systems (which had fully revived)! Such is the real nature of the effort of religious writers to instruct "the intelligent artisan."

In point of historical fact Professor Lotze, of



Göttingen University, did begin, after the middle of the century, to win widespread interest in a new spiritual philosophy. He recognised that the great advance and fascinating message of science had seduced men from the old philosophy, as well as the old creeds, and he set out to reconcile these facts of science with idealist philosophy. I need not expound his system at any length, for—as is the common fate of philosophers—it is little noticed to-day outside the pages of a history of nineteenth-century thought. Lotze emphatically rejected the idea of a vital force, which Bergson has revived, and handed over the whole domain of life, below the human level, to the men of science. But he claimed just as emphatically that the mind of man is “spiritual,” and he represented God as a “world-ground” of all that exists. So far was he from reconciling religion (in the sense assumed here) with science that no orthodox theologian would admit his God or his conception of the soul, and no scientific man would grant his claim that the material world is only “a mode of action of spirit.”

After Lotze German philosophers continued, like industrious spiders, to spin new systems, though, unlike spiders, they generally used the material of the broken and discarded systems of their predecessors. Most of them built upon either Kant or Hegel, and they gave little more support to conventional religious beliefs than Kant and Hegel had done. It will be enough to glance at the ideas of the well-known professor of philosophy at Jena University, Dr. Rudolf Eucken.

Let it at once be clearly understood that Professor

Eucken offers no support whatever to Christian theology. In almost all his works (especially *The Truth about Religion*, *The Transient and the Permanent in Christianity*, and *Religion and Life*) he plainly and repeatedly states that the dogmas of the Christian creed must go. He does not admit the cardinal points of the Christian scheme: the fall, the miraculous birth of Christ, the atonement, and the resurrection. The notion of redemption through a mediator he pronounces "an outrage on God and a violation of the fundamental principle of religion" (*The Truth about Religion*, p. 434). We can, he says, "no longer wear the old clothes." Christianity was born in a world which was in "a state of resignation and degeneration," and "many [of its] forms are now but anthropomorphisms which two thousand years ago satisfied the best minds" (*Religion and Life*, pp. 41 and 42). |

It will thus be seen that the support which Professor Eucken gives to "religion" is very gravely misrepresented to people who have not the leisure or training to read philosophy. There is scarcely an article of the creed that he does not flatly reject or dilute into something which no Church would accept. It is true that he professes himself a devoted Christian, but on this side he speaks as an historian, not as a philosopher, and his historical knowledge is as scanty and inaccurate as is that of most writers who praise the superiority of Christianity. He seems to be quite unacquainted with the other religions which he supposes to be inferior to Christianity. It is historically false that Christianity appealed to "a tired world devoid of any special hope," or that Christianity had any special

distinction in placing man's greatness in morality or in expounding "the soul's relation to God." What I have previously said will have made it clear to the reader that this is a mere repetition of quite false Christian claims by a professor who is wandering uncritically outside his own field of culture. And that is all the support that Rudolf Eucken gives to Christianity.

Moreover, the support which Eucken gives to the more fundamental religious ideas is of very questionable value. He is very emphatic indeed on "the spiritual life," but the majority of people are not much influenced when they learn that the spiritual life is "the realisation of life in its entirety," or "the tangible experience of being supported or uplifted by the divine power," or "an extension of the boundary of human existence in the direction of the construction of a specific reality in the Infinite and Eternal." It may be "superficial," but we really prefer to tell ourselves, in plain English, that all human progress depends upon the cultivation of mind and character and fine sentiments, whatever their nature is; and in practice it seems to come to the same thing. The kind of religion which pervades Eucken's works may be helpful to a few thoughtful and mystically-minded people; it has certainly no use for the overwhelming majority, to whom it will always be unintelligible.

On the specific issues of God and immortality Eucken is very far removed from Christianity, and his name ought never to be mentioned by any Christian writer as a supporter. He does not believe in personal immortality—"anthropomorphic

immortality," he calls it—and he is content with the vague assurance that the soul is (like an atom of hydrogen) "a participator in eternity" (*The Truth of Religion*, p. 272). He does not believe in a personal God, but in a "Godhead" or "divine element" of an impersonal character. In fine, he rejects all the supposed rational proofs of the existence of God or a spiritual world, and, like Bergson, relies on intuition or inner experience. There must be a Godhead because you "experience an impulse" to believe it. How any clergyman can seriously represent this system of thought, or rhetoric, as a support of his religion I cannot imagine. Yet there is no other living philosopher who is so frequently and emphatically quoted—not in his own words, but as a supporter of religion—by clerical writers.

Much the same may be said of the American philosopher, of Harvard University, Dr. Josiah Royce. He, like Eucken, rejects all the arguments for God and immortality which are current in Christian literature, and retires to heights of mysticism in which none but a trained student of metaphysics can hope to breathe. Belief must be based upon internal experience, not upon reasoning about nature; and after a highly metaphysical analysis of our internal experience he concludes that there is an "absolute experience" to which must correspond an "absolute reality." That is the nearest approach we get to a God; while the idea of personal immortality is ignored altogether. Like Eucken also Professor Royce rejects the characteristic doctrines of Christianity, and in his most recent work (*The Problem of Christianity*) he

entirely thrusts aside the orthodox teaching about Christ and lends to the accepted religion a support which I must express in his own words (p. 387) :

“ The essential message of Christianity has been the word that the sense of life, the very being of the time-process itself, consists in the progressive realisation of the Universal Community in and through the longings, the vicissitudes, the tragedies, and the triumphs of this process of the temporal world.”

In this Professor Royce not only reduces God and Christ (who, he says, “ imperfectly ” set forth the truths of religion) to the rank of secondary considerations, but he argues from a very questionable record of the early experience of Christianity which he accepts as uncritically as Eucken.

Still less satisfactory is the message of that other distinguished American thinker, the late Professor W. James, who also is very frequently named as a supporter of religion. In his latest work, *A Pluralistic Universe*, he argues from our inner experience that there is a spiritual world beyond or above us. He thinks that a man finds that “ the tenderer parts of his personal life are continuous with a *more* of the same quality ” (p. 307). But he finds such grave difficulties in the Christian idea of one Supreme Being—he has almost ridiculed it in his earlier works—that he prefers to be a “ pluralist.” He means, of course, that there are several or many spiritual beings above us, but he avoids the word polytheism because it “ gives offence.” In a word, he totally rejects the God of even the most liberal theologian, and we know from his earlier works (*Varieties of Religious Experience*, etc.) that his long experience of psychic research

has not convinced him that man, as a distinct personality, survives the grave. The religious reader is welcome to find what comfort and support he can in James's "empirical pluralism."

In the writings of Professor James Ward, one of the most distinguished of our English professional philosophers, the believer will at first find more consolation, but it grows cold before the end of Professor Ward's volumes is reached. In his *Realm of Ends*, which is a sequel to the well-known attack upon scientific Agnosticism in his earlier work (*Naturalism and Agnosticism*), he makes a profession of faith. He believes in a personal God, personal immortality, and the freedom of the will. It is true that, like all the preceding philosophers, he is anxious to reform Christianity; which means, as usual, that he rejects all the characteristic doctrines of the Christian religion. Yet it is something—it is, in fact, a rare thing among modern leaders of culture—to find a distinguished philosopher professing a belief in a personal God and personal immortality.

But one may doubt if the believer will be much soothed if he makes his laborious way through Professor Ward's volume instead of being content with this promising summary of his conclusions. Professor Ward will have none of the "intuition" or instinct which other religious philosophers esteem. He stands for a "rational" theism. But the believer in God, who has been accustomed to rely upon the familiar arguments from nature, will find that Professor Ward rejects or ignores these in a very significant manner. He finds his foundation, as Kant did, in the moral world. The world,

seeing that it contains this peremptory moral ideal, would be quite irrational unless we admit a divine author of it and a future life in which its sacredness will be vindicated. With regard to the nature of this God Professor Ward can do no more than feebly remark that he is "least inadequately conceived as personal" (which to William James is a monstrosity), and of the future life he merely pleads that, to be effective, it must imply "a certain personal continuity." It is all as dim as the other world of the ancient pagans, which Christians have derided for two millennia. Now the most satisfactory of their philosophers brings them back to it.

On an earlier page I described the extraordinary way in which Professor Ward tries to reconcile this shadowy God of his with the uglier features of the universe. This God, it seems, cannot convince men that fire burns, and cannot prevent fires (or wars) arising. The "experiment has to be tried"; he might add that each new generation has to try it afresh. The basis of Professor Ward's rational theism is just as feeble. This transcendental moral ideal of his does not exist. We understand the moral law quite well as a social law. The progress and comfort of our social life require that we observe certain rules. These rules are related solely to *this* life, and do not in the least imply any "life beyond" or any other legislator than humanity. Professor Ward's distinguished colleague in the University of London, Professor Carveth Read, has shown, in an able volume (*Natural and Social Morals*), that, to use his own words, "natural and social conditions are a sufficient

ground of the moral life " (p. 243). We are sometimes told that Professor Haeckel is forty years out of date. Professor Ward is a hundred years behind the times.

It would be useless to prolong this examination of the works of modern philosophers. I have considered those who are most confidently quoted as supporters of religion. They give no support whatever to Christianity, and the kind of religion they offer is in nearly all cases such as a Christian divine would emphatically reject. It is far less substantial than the Deism of the eighteenth-century "infidels," and it is far more academic, and unintelligible to the public, than the Stoic philosophy which the clergy have for centuries derided (knowing, as usual, little or nothing about its vast practical influence) as "above the heads of the people." Yet even these meagre and unsatisfactory allies of the clergy are but a few out of a hundred professors of philosophy. I beg the reader to understand clearly that I have not chosen philosophers whose religious contributions are weak and ambiguous. I have chosen, as many will know, precisely the most distinguished of the few who are quoted by religious writers themselves. The vast majority of our modern philosophers never discuss religion. The significance of this can hardly be misunderstood. If any are reluctant to admit it, let them read section 8 of the 9th chapter of the work to which I have just referred, which Professor Carveth Read himself thus summarises: "Attitude of Philosophy to Religion. Theism. Weakening of beliefs in Personality, Immortality, Providence."



## CHAPTER III

### ATTEMPTS TO RECONSTRUCT CHRISTIANITY

FROM the preceding chapters the reader will have gathered that modern philosophy is, in any case, a very frail reed for theology to lean upon. There is probably no other branch of culture in which the leading thinkers differ so widely from each other. On matters not connected with religion one might be able to draw up a short list of statements on which most philosophers are agreed, but on the main lines of philosophical theory, and especially on those lines which have any relation to religion, there is no agreement. Philosophy is not, like science or history or economics, a body of statements of fact and generalisations of fact on which there is general agreement. It is a collection of individual and contradictory speculations.

It may seem to the reader that, while this certainly weakens the claim that philosophy supports religion, it would just as clearly weaken any claim that it opposes religion. In other words, how, in such circumstances, can there be any "verdict of philosophy" at all? But I have explained what I meant. Originally philosophy was scarcely more than a branch of thought with the supreme purpose of proving the truths of religion by reasoning. The fact that philosophy

has now been secularised, and that the religious speculations in which some philosophers indulge in their leisure hours are contradictory and are commonly based upon "intuition" instead of reason, is a very grave fact for religious belief. For those who are able to appreciate this development of modern thought it is as heavy a blow at the foundations of Christianity, and all religion, as science and history have dealt at the superstructure of dogmas.

With regard to the Christian dogmas in particular the verdict of philosophy is not ambiguous. I mean, of course, the verdict of philosophers, because philosophy as such has, like science as such, now nothing to do with religion. But the extraordinary agreement of all the divergent thinkers I have examined in rejecting the specific doctrines of Christianity has certainly a very serious significance. These men stand for the highest and purest use of reason. By reason they have judged the Christian doctrines and condemned them. I have a large acquaintance with the philosophical literature of Europe and America, having once been a professor of philosophy, and I do not know any distinguished writer in that field who accepts the teaching of any Church. I need not emphasise the significance of that.

In regard to what is called "natural religion" I have candidly described how many philosophers support it. But, besides the fact that they often build on instinct instead of reason and generally contradict each other, there is another fact which it is very material to appreciate. In current

religious literature it is still customary to give the old and familiar arguments for God and immortality. The "atheist" is rebuked by rhetorical appeals to the order and beauty of nature, the purposiveness of the structure of animals and plants, the need of a "First Cause" and "Prime Mover," and so on. Now these arguments belong to the order of philosophy; and the very grave fact to which I would here draw attention is that *scarcely a single modern philosopher has any respect for them*. The preceding chapters will have made that plain. The clergy are, to use a popular phrase, stumping the country on a false cry. These familiar arguments which they use have been weighed in the scale of modern philosophy and condemned. This is so clear that the ablest writer in one of the ablest collections of religious apologetic essays that have been published in recent years (*Foundations*, by "Seven Oxford Men") quotes (p. 427) with approval the following words of Professor W. James :

"That vast literature of proofs of God's existence drawn from the order of nature, which a century ago seemed so overwhelmingly convincing, to-day does little more than gather dust in libraries."

And the author, Mr. Moberly, lecturer on philosophy at Oxford, declines even to examine these old arguments on the ground that it would be to "slay the slain" (p. 432).

But Professor James and Mr. Moberly, and the many cultivated religious writers who say these things, are wrong in one respect. These arguments

may have been pronounced useless by modern philosophers, but they are neither dead nor do they gather dust in libraries. *The overwhelming majority of believers are still taught by the clergy that they are valid.* Any reader can verify this for himself. I am not thinking of rural congregations, for whose entertainment some ignorant preacher occasionally slays—with the jaw-bone of an ass, it appears—the “fool” who says in his heart that there is no God. I am referring to the religious literature which is purveyed to the working-class and middle-class believers of our towns and cities. It quite generally relies on these old arguments from nature. The philosophers I have described simply minister to a select and highly educated few. For the mass of believers the clergy still provide the old discredited “proofs.” There is the same deception of the uneducated as we saw in the preceding sections. The ordinary man or woman could not understand the message of Eucken or Royce, or even Mr. Moberly. It is a metaphysic rather than a religion. Very well: let the ordinary man or woman—the overwhelming majority of believers—understand clearly that philosophers, whose business it is to judge such things, and many divines, drastically condemn as invalid the proofs on which they are taught to base their faith.

We then have to consider what we may regard as an intermediate school between the philosophers and the general religious public. I will not take the trouble in this book to examine the arguments used by such popular writers as Father Gerard (and

all Catholic writers), Dr. Ballard, Dr. Horton, and so on. It would be, as the earnestly Christian Mr. Moberly says, to "slay the slain." I will select rather a group of apologists who realise the bankruptcy of the old natural theology and try to found a new one. Some do this by recasting the old arguments; some by appealing to the modern philosophers whom I have examined. Of the latter class Mr. Moberly is an able representative, and I will glance at his lengthy essay.

The book (*Foundations*) of which it forms a part is an attempt to formulate afresh the Christian doctrines in terms which may be acceptable to the educated modern mind. With such attempts I have no concern in this book. I have examined similar efforts, rather satirically, in my study of the opinions of Sir Oliver Lodge. It is very difficult to consider with any patience or politeness a suggestion that, although there never were Adam and Eve and Eden, the "fall of man" is true because when primitive men became conscious of moral ideas they also began to "fall." It is improper to say that one believes in the divinity of Christ when one means that all good men are more or less "divine." It is useless to speak of the atonement being "true" in some sense when you no longer believe that Christ died in order to deliver men from the punishment of sin. These "reconstructions" seem to me to have only one clear use: they enable more or less tender-minded clergymen to say that they believe what they do not believe. The sole question with which I am concerned is whether the official and age-old

teaching of the Churches—the faith of the millions—has or has not been discredited. When the educated clergy frankly tell the general public that the old doctrines are discredited we may have some interest in examining the new.

In this volume of “reconstructions” Mr. Moberly is entrusted with the task of proving the existence of God. As I said, he surrenders all the old arguments. “The most salient fact in the present situation,” he says (p. 427), “is the breakdown of the traditional basis [of belief in God].” In particular he examines and rejects the popular argument for a “First Cause.” He then argues, as Royce does, that our fragmentary or relative experience compels us to think there is an “Absolute Reality” beyond it, and, in a still feebler and more technical argument, he urges that this Reality must be interpreted in terms of spirit. From our moral experience he adds that this Reality must be “good.” He claims that this “Absolute” is “something bigger and wider than any personal or quasi-personal God,” and says that in comparison with it the Christian idea of a personal God who rewards good men is “too naive, too much like a fairy story.”

Now I am not here going to examine Mr. Moberly’s argument. He admits in the end that his “suggestions” are “fragmentary and unsatisfying”—just as the authors of the book confess in its “Epilogue” that they feel they “have not succeeded.” He says that “philosophy can offer no pocket-answer to infidelity,” and “cannot make an irreligious man religious.” This

is a rare and reputable candour in religious literature. But I am not here appealing to the cultivated world to which Mr. Moberly appeals, and will not linger over his effort. I quote it in order to show the ordinary believer that a religious thinker who is properly acquainted with modern philosophy can offer only certain rather dim suggestions of a kind of God which he, the common man, can barely understand and will most certainly not pray to.

Next I may notice the latest work of Mr. A. J. Balfour. His political opponents are apt to describe Mr. Balfour as "a metaphysician," but metaphysicians usually regard him as a politician. I have, at all events, felt that it was more just to place him in this class of intermediate writers than in the preceding group of philosophers. In his published Gifford Lectures (*Theism and Humanism*) he professes a belief in "God, freedom, and immortality," and promises to vindicate his belief in God "from the plain man's point of view"; and he means "a God whom men can love, a God to whom men can pray," not the Absolute of the religious metaphysicians.

Now this is to say at once that he is going to rely upon the arguments which, Professor James says, gather dust in libraries. His argument is, in fact, broadly speaking, an inference from nature to God. Our sense of beauty, our moral sense, and even our power of knowledge, are not valid, and cannot even be explained in their origin, unless we admit God. This is an original version of the old argument, but it is at once so clearly vitiated

by its excess that probably few will seriously follow Mr. Balfour. As far as our sense of beauty and our knowledge are concerned, his claim is a sheer paradox. To say that a man has no right to appreciate, or will not appreciate, fine music or sculpture unless he believes in God is pushing academic elegance too far. It is, further, quite untrue that a professor of æsthetics cannot explain the rise of our sense of beauty without introducing God, and that a professor of sociology or anthropology cannot explain the moral sense on natural lines. In other words, the first and third parts of Mr. Balfour's argument are so original that nobody else is likely to follow them; and the third is the well-worn argument from conscience to which I have already referred. *Man* is now believed to have been the moral legislator; and the moral law is better observed than it ever was before.

A third example is the work of Dr. Otto (*Naturalism and Religion*), which I have previously described as an enlightened piece of apologetics and, probably, a fair reflection of the religious views of a few of our English men of science. It is translated by Professor J. A. Thomson, and published in the "Crown Theological Library." Dr. Otto is the professor of theology at the University of Göttingen, and it is his chief merit that he seeks to find a foundation for religion after making what he conceives to be the legitimate demands of modern science and philosophy. The Rev. Dr. Morrison, who writes the introduction, observes that while "rival ecclesiastical parties" wrangle "the thinking classes in modern



Europe are becoming more and more stirred by the really vital question whether there is room in the educated mind for a religious conception of the world at all." Dr. Otto's book is believed to have great value in this debate on account of its reconstruction of religious argument with full regard to the claims of science and philosophy.

Dr. Morrison, and Dr. Otto, and the many other cultivated divines and religious writers I have quoted in the same sense, are right. Religion is on trial in the educated mind of Europe. The Churches number millions of followers in every country only because the millions have not leisure or training to read really serious discussions of religion; and the religious literature they do read, and the sermons they hear, are grossly misleading. Educated people pass yearly in large numbers away from religion; the Churches very rarely announce any convert among "the thinking classes." The current flows steadily in one direction. Those claims of science, history, and philosophy which I have summarised are responsible for this movement away from religion, and it is the purpose of such liberal theological works as this of Dr. Otto to show that the claims may be granted yet religion saved.

In spite of its earnestness and ability the book is a complete failure; a type of the failure of this class of literature. It makes large concessions to science—such as the possible eternity of matter, the natural origin of life, the evolution of man—but we very soon find that the spirit of concession is limited, not by the scientific evidence, but by

the religious "will to believe." Dr. Otto pins his faith upon the theory that life is immaterial. That is to take one side, and apparently the losing side, in a great biological controversy. He also speaks constantly of materialism as the alternative to spiritualism; whereas it cannot too frequently be repeated that the alternative for the overwhelming majority of people is agnosticism—a refusal to dogmatise either way. On more important points his language is vague and rhetorical. The vital question of immortality—he calls it (p. 281) a "relatively small question"—he dismisses in three pages, apparently granting that he can offer no definite argument for it. His argument for God is little less vague and poetical, and in large part it runs on the old lines: we cannot understand nature without God.

His work, in fact, consists of two parts. The first is a lengthy proof that "naturalism" is not a complete and perfect explanation of the universe; which no man who has a moderate acquaintance with science will doubt for a moment. The second is that the blurred or befogged parts of the universe, particularly the mental world, must be spiritual, not material; while the majority of us will prudently decline to make any assertion whatever about the nature of obscure things.

More glaring still is this failure of a pretentious ambition to reconcile the new culture with theology in a recent work, by J. N. Shearman (the *Rev.* J. N. Shearman, I believe, but he modestly omits the title), called *The Natural Theology of Evolution*. The author remarks that Darwinism has so com-

pletely discredited the old Paleyist arguments that now "natural theology is a subject everywhere ignored." He is going to reconstruct it on a philosophical basis. In point of fact, his argument mainly consists of two well-worn themes: first, the multitudinous things which science cannot (at present) explain and must leave to the natural theologian, and secondly the very familiar discussion (supported by the very familiar illustrations about the possibility of producing a poem by throwing down a handful of type) of what can and cannot be done by "chance." He quite fails to grasp the action of the mechanism of evolution and the proper attitude to take up where—it may be only for a time—the action of that mechanism is not clear to us.

The same may be said of the very popular works of Sir Oliver Lodge, which I have examined in full elsewhere (*The Religion of Sir Oliver Lodge*). He relies very heavily upon the view that life is not mechanical in its nature; that is, as I said, to rely on one side in a biological controversy. He at times warns us not to pin our belief in God to phenomena in nature which "science cannot explain," and at other times (or most times) he emphatically urges such phenomena (often phenomena, like sunrise in the Alps, which are not mysterious at all) as a basis for theism. All his attempts to infer God from the totality of nature, as distinct from these particular obscure phenomena, are mere rhetoric. His "proofs" of the immortality of the soul, apart from psychic research, are simply poetical similes which one must

not press too far; and his proofs from psychical research are an uncritical record of anecdotes and experiences which excite the disdain of the overwhelming mass of his scientific colleagues. *Raymond*, his latest work, is the feeblest of all.

The chief religious work of Dr. A. Russel Wallace (*The World of Life*) can hardly be discussed without endangering the respect which every social and scientific student wishes to retain for the fine personality of the author. As a record of the evolution of life on earth it is painfully inaccurate, and the introduction of God at every step to explain developments which offer no difficulty whatever to the evolutionist to-day can only be attributed to a certain natural debility of mind at so advanced an age. Dr. Wallace was one of the last scientific men to question the evolution of the human mind, and one gathers from his works that, in his zeal for spiritist opinions, he has failed to examine the enormous mass of evidence of mental evolution which has gradually accumulated in the sciences of prehistoric archæology and anthropology. Long before Dr. Wallace died the evolution of man's mind was as solidly established as the evolution of the body.

These various types of what I have called the intermediate religious literature will suffice for my purpose. I have again chosen the spokesmen who are generally regarded as the ablest. They entirely fail to reconstruct that basis of rational belief in God and immortality on which Christianity, like every other religion, ultimately rests. All these writers demand a "re-interpretation" of Christian

doctrines. I have explained that this does not interest the majority of thoughtful people because it leaves the various branches of Christianity utterly discredited by having for ages taught the *wrong* interpretation. In point of fact, this talk of "re-interpreting" is repugnant to a sincere mind. Christ and Paul and Augustine, the founders of Christian theology, meant certain definite things which these moderns certainly do not mean. The latter are seeking to found a new theology, and they would do better to give it a new name. But a second and stronger reason for disregarding these attempts to reconstruct doctrines will now be apparent. Until the foundation is safe, it is little use tinkering with the superstructure. The preceding pages have shown that the basis is the very reverse of safe. Philosophy and science have undermined the old foundations of Christianity, and not a single one amongst these modern efforts to re-establish them commands our respect. The whole structure is doomed.

Instead, therefore, of prolonging this review of recent apologetic literature, let me again make a broad survey of the religious world. In an earlier chapter I likened it to a series of geological strata. There is the immensely thick Archæan or primitive level: thicker than all the others put together. This is most conspicuous in the Church of Rome, where, out of 190 million believers, no less than 120 million are totally illiterate and densely ignorant—a remarkable comment, by the way, on the claim that the Catholic Church has been a great educator. In Russia and the Slav lands

generally the state of things is much the same. In the Protestant Churches there is a far less proportion of actual illiteracy, but no one will question that the solid mass of believers are too feebly educated to appreciate religious issues as they really stand in modern thought. I am not for a moment expressing disdain of these millions. None but a fool would lay the blame on them. They are the victims of our economic order. I lay it down as a simple fact of life that they do not think deeply or read serious literature, and the kind of religious and apologetic literature they *do* sometimes read—the kind of stuff they hear in sermons—is not fitting matter for consideration in this work.

From this level we rise through ever-thinning strata. There are the hundreds of thousands of artisans, tradesmen, clerks, etc., who perceive that religion is to-day fiercely disputed, and must have a literature above the parochial level. Large numbers of the men and women of what are called (on financial grounds) the middle and upper classes belong to the same stratum. For these we have a vast outpour of apologetic literature: the Catholic Truth Society, the Jesuits, Dr. Ballard, Dr. Horton, Canon Lewis, Mr. Shearman, Dr. W. Barry, Sir Oliver Lodge, "Father" Waggett, Canon Henson, Mr. Campbell, etc., etc.

This literature in varying degrees *fights* modern culture, while pretending to reconcile it with theology. There is not a single work in the whole vast output that does not at some point conflict with the established positions of science and his-

tory, and does not at a score of other points take the losing side in some scientific or historical controversy. A very large proportion of these works utterly mislead their readers as to the present position of science and history and philosophy. They occasionally garble quotations—I have over and over again publicly accused religious authors by name of doing this—and they very frequently take their quotations from scientific writers of the last (or last but one) generation and conceal the fact from their readers. The literature of the Archæan level is merely ignorant. One smiles at it. The literature of this next religious level is very imperfectly and inaccurately informed, but its worse defect is that it contains so much dishonesty, trickery, vituperation, misrepresentation, and conceit. With regard, in particular, to the belief in God and immortality, any person who has a moderate acquaintance with this literature will know that it relies entirely upon those “proofs” which, we have just seen, philosophers and the more cultivated divines drastically condemn.

The thin upper stratum of religious belief, a few thousands of cultivated believers in each Church, has the literature which I have described. It reads the *Hibbert Journal*, and the Hibbert and Gifford Lectures, and similar literature. It is amazingly disunited—one man, one theory—and it gives one the impression of being tremendously dispirited and solemn. It at one moment talks of restoring “joy” to a world which is “darkened by materialism,” and at another moment it

rebukes the world for its pleasures and recalls it to "the austere truths of the spirit." In a genial way one is amused by its unconscious conceit. It fancies itself as the salt of the religious world, the leaven of the future, the small group of sages who alone see the truth in science on the one hand and the old religious traditions on the other. In point of fact the writers of this group rarely have, or are able to understand, the scientific habit of mind, and they have, as a rule, a very imperfect and superficial knowledge of science. They are a futile, highly respectable class, shivering under the verdict of modern science and philosophy, drifting into all sorts of mysticisms, hailing each eccentric philosopher who appears (Bergson, Eucken, Rabin-dranath Tagore, etc.) as the Messiah whom their impersonal God will yet send to deliver the world from this terrible danger of materialism.

That is, in the end, what it comes to. In the higher culture of the modern world God is an ever-changing and unsubstantial phantom; immortality is almost entirely surrendered; the specific doctrines of Christianity have scarcely a defender. But all the scattered and despairing forces reunite in saying that it is immensely important to believe in spirit and to combat materialism. To the outsider this is the most ironic feature of the whole religious development. Not only does it not matter two pins for practical purposes whether the mind is spiritual or material—it remains equally important to cultivate it—but I do not know a single writer of our time of any consequence who calls himself a materialist. The dogmatic



statement that nothing exists except matter is, and always was, very rare. The religious writers who say most about materialism dare not quote a single scientist or philosopher who accepts the title. But even if materialism as a philosophy of the universe were commonly professed by men of science, the fact would not have the slightest moral or social significance. The Stoics, who brought a splendid inspiration into the Roman Empire, were "materialists." The Christians who followed them, and suffered their grand work to crumble into ruins, were "spiritualists." There is no more foolish superstition in modern literature than this "dread of materialism" which pervades the religious world.

## SECTION IV

### THE VERDICT OF HUMANITY

#### CHAPTER I

##### THE VOICE OF THE HEART

THE preceding sections have surely demonstrated that religion is intellectually bankrupt. As far as Christianity itself is concerned the fact that only a very small minority of our intellectual leaders profess to accept its doctrines raises an acute suspicion, and the summary I have given of the modern indictment of it explains their attitude. The few distinguished laymen who associate with it call openly for a "re-statement" or curtailment of its doctrines. So, we saw, do many of the clergy. But there is little hope for this new sort of Christianity, which will teach things that Christ and Paul emphatically did not teach, because the very foundations of religion are crumbling. The belief in God and immortality rests to-day, in the minds of serious people, upon a set of incoherent, vague, more or less rhetorical "considerations." The bankruptcy is as plain in this department of religion as in the other.

It is a dramatic moment in history. Wagner once wrote a famous musical drama called "The Twilight of the Gods." Under the guise of a

description of the dethronement of the Teutonic deities he seems to have wished to portray the religious development of modern times. A brilliant Polish novelist made a theme of the passing of the old Roman gods. The world is not moved by these pageants. These were "false gods"; mists that obscured the rising sun. With the death of the Christian God, who is also the God of the Moham-medans, all deity dies. The last representative of the dynasty of super-men expires. The luminous cloud which some modern philosophers would put upon the vacant throne will never command the respect or attention of the world. Religion is bankrupt; and if the clergy suspended for twenty years their efforts on its behalf it would almost disappear from educated countries. The historian of the future will observe with amazement how calmly these folk of the twentieth century abandoned the promise of immortality and of divine help. Not a tear falls upon the grave of the gods. The clergy alone lament.

And this leads me to the last part of my indictment. The clergy seek to escape the final blow by an appeal to the heart of man. This indictment, they say, is purely intellectual. It is the verdict of only half the jury. It is the voice of only half the man. They hark back to the sentiment of Cardinal Newman, which they disdained in the days when they still cherished dreams of a "rational theism." The razor, Newman said, is a very fine instrument, but it will not cut granite. Reason is a wonderful faculty, but it is out of place in the domain of religion.

The clergy see an escape in this direction. Hence the fervour with which they greet Bergson. He has never professed any belief in God or immortality, but he has eloquently asserted that, while reason is the proper instrument for scientific research, *it is far less sure and penetrating than instinct in the domain of "spiritual truth."* Do you now understand the canonisation of Professor Bergson? It is the same with Eucken. His conclusions are unsatisfactory, but his method is excellent; you *feel*, you *intue*, the truth of religion. Hence also the gracious appreciation of the new philosophy called Pragmatism or Humanism. It belittles reason.

This philosophical subterfuge is put into appropriate language for the unphilosophic. The mass of believers, we saw, need no relief. They know nothing about the pressure of modern culture. They are protected by the pneumatic cushions of ignorance. Their clerical guides still tear evolution to shreds for them, and prove the divine origin of life and the creation of man and the miraculous triumph of Christianity. Those—workers or others—who break through this compound, as one may call it, and discover the real situation of religion, are now often educated in the new gospel. "Philosophy," which means M. Bergson (the clergy are adepts at taking the part for the whole), has come to believe that the use of reason in religious matters is a mistake. You must trust your "sympathy"; a word Bergson often uses, though not quite with the same meaning. The intellect is—for some unknown reason—"cold," and the heart is "warm."

Surely a sensible man, and especially a sensible woman, will distrust the "cold" light of reason and listen to the "warm" assurance of the heart? There is a subtle suggestion of greater comfort. And then think of the wonderful truths discovered by the "intuitions" of the "great sages" of all time: Pythagoras, Plato, Christ, etc.

To this new evasion the reply is easy. First, philosophy does not consist of Professors Bergson and Eucken, but of many scores of professors and writers who utterly condemn their appeal to instinct and intuition. Secondly, M. Bergson, the charm of whose works is mainly due, and what solidity they have is entirely due, to his large borrowing of the *reasoned* conclusions of scientific men, has apparently never discovered by his highly trained instinct whether there is a God or no, and whether the soul is or is not immortal. Thirdly, it is rather a significant fact that the clergy, after reasoning about religion since the days of Thomas Aquinas, in the thirteenth century, now find that it is quite a mistake to reason about religion. Fourthly, seeing that there have been religious mystics for the last thousand years, one would like to know which of them discovered that Christianity was teaching a mass of errors and needed to reconstruct its doctrines, or whether this had to be discovered by reason. Fifthly, one would like to know which of these new mystics would trust his instincts a single inch in the investigation of any other statements than those of religion.

Sixthly—this requires a separate paragraph—one would like to know how it is that this sure and

unerring instinct delivers three hundred contradictory messages in the three hundred different religions and sects, and how it is that, when the members of these religions do not abuse each other, they *reason* with each other instead of appealing to instinct. The "religious sense" of the Modernist seems to differ materially from that of the Pope. The instinct of the Catholic finds white black according to the instinct of the Protestant. The Anglican, Baptist, Methodist, Congregationalist, and Unitarian receive quite different assurances from the inner oracle. The Mohammedan feels no warm glow when he reads the New Testament. The strict Buddhist, who certainly relies on religious intuition, puzzles western scholars so much that they are undecided whether or no to class him as an atheist; he at least scornfully rejects the idea of a reward in heaven. The good Confucian, after consulting his religious sense, tells us to "respect spiritual beings, if there are any, but have nothing to do with them." A wonderfully versatile and accommodating thing is this religious sense or instinct or intuition.

Seriously, this sort of psychology is on a level with that of the popular novelist who makes his heroine discover by her "woman's intuition" which is the real villain, and so clear the fair fame of her lover. In actual life she is the last person the detective will listen to. Intuition is a legitimate function of the human mind. It is direct perception. But we do not directly perceive God and heaven. We "intue" the ideas which we may have of them. Whether there is any reality correspond-

ing to those ideas it is wholly beyond the province of intuition to determine. Whether you conceive God as what plain folk call God, or as a "divine element" or an "Absolute" or a "world-ground," you *infer* him (or it) from something else. You reason. As to "instinct," it is pathetic that M. Bergson should have popularised the word just when our comparative psychologists were thinking of putting it out of the dictionary. It is, in any case, not a way of *knowing* things, but of *doing* things.

So much for the philosophical side of the matter. But the phrases "cold reason" and "warm heart" betray that the appeal of the clergy is more insidious than this. I have known women actually to give a little shiver when they speak of "cold reason," and glow when they refer to the warmth of the heart. In plain English they are consulting their emotions, and the clergy encourage them to do it. "Consult your heart" is a not uncommon exhortation nowadays.

Why should one not consult one's heart, as well as one's reason? The answer, again, is simple. If you care more for the comfort your belief gives you than for the truth of it, by all means consult your emotions. How a belief which may or may not be true can give any comfort it is not easy to understand. No one would dream of disturbing the beliefs of aged folk whose eyes are turned yearningly to heaven; though I have not noticed that that is the common attitude of aged people. No one invades the private sanctuary of any religious person. Rationalism has no ministers who intrude

upon the attention of the unwilling, and enforce their doctrines upon children, teachers, prisoners, soldiers, servants, nurses, aldermen, paupers, etc. I have in mind free inquiring people; men and women who know that the statements of religion are disputed. The people who are quite indifferent whether their beliefs are true or no may by all means "consult their hearts."

But what is usually meant is that the heart, or the emotions, can tell you whether or no your beliefs are true. One may settle this oneself, without going deeply into psychology. Broadly speaking, the difference between man and the lower animals is that the animal's emotions are related directly (as a rule) to realities, but the man's emotions may be inspired entirely by *ideas*. A suspicion, a hope, a piece of false news, an entirely wrong impression of a person, may excite the most vivid emotions. A character in fiction may make us weep or throw us into anger. It is only an idea. Rivers of tears have washed the feet of the crucified Christ, but it is now disputed if he ever was crucified. At all events the resurrection has drawn out floods of emotion for centuries, yet very many divines now regard it as a myth, and very few lay scholars regard it as anything else.

In short, your emotions may or may not respond accurately to the pleasant or unpleasant features of your ideas, but they have nothing whatever to do with the question whether there is any *reality* corresponding to your ideas. The emotions which a mother feels when it is falsely announced that her son has been shot give not the least clue to the



question whether he has or has not been shot. The joy of a man who hears that he has probably inherited a fortune does not help him to discover whether it is a fact. The comfort of a hope of, or belief in, immortality has not one whit more to do with the fact. An idea of God will in some people create intense emotions whether it corresponds to a reality or no. There is no "voice" of the heart. It gives not even an inarticulate message as to realities. Our emotions give us impulses to act, and hence it is sometimes said, figuratively, that the heart "counsels" us to do so and so. It is this figure of speech, referring to a quite different function of our emotions, which has been desperately elevated to the rank of a philosophy.

But let us approach the subject from another point of view. It may be said that all this is psychologically or philosophically accurate, yet the fact remains that the heart clings to religion against the decisions of the head. A sort of compromise has been suggested. Professor W. James, being an acute psychologist, noticed that (as most people had noticed before) our judgments and reasonings are never purely intellectual. The "heart" has a word in the matter. Interests, emotions, associations, etc., mix themselves with the intellectual issue, and help to shape the verdict. Professor James represented that this, not the purely intellectual scheme of the manual of logic, is the normal and proper type of man's mental action; it was proper, he said, because it paid more attention to the value to us of beliefs than to mere academic accuracy. This curious philosophy,

known as Pragmatism (and by some sacrilegiously mis-called Humanism), was, of course, graciously welcomed in religious circles; although James, like Bergson, never professed that his method led to a belief in a personal God.

Pragmatism is but one of the many efforts we have seen to evade the pressure of modern culture. Its discovery that our judgments are never purely intellectual is naive. In political, religious, social, ethical, and other controversies we have all been familiar with the fact from our youth. Men, in dispute, have for ages cast the opprobrious word "prejudice" at each other's heads. We are all Pragmatists in judging other people's judgments, and we all flatter ourselves that our own judgments are purely intellectual. To set up the average muddled judgment, which is responsible for half the confusion of life, as an ideal—to set up interest as a standard of truth—is a monstrosity. When our neighbour errs (*i.e.* differs from us), we do not tell him to use his feelings, but to make a better use of his reason. Sir Leslie Stephen, who was a friend of Professor James, once handed me James's book (a present from the author) with the remark: "The old story—weaving faith out of moonshine." Stephen was the incarnation of common sense.

But, as I said, there is a more direct and more profitable attack upon these vagaries. At the bottom of them all is the assumption that emotion is on the side of religion, whatever reason says. This assumption is quite false. The only plausible ground for it is that women are understood to be far more religious than men. Now this fact itself

is grossly exaggerated. In the only city in which an accurate census of church-going has been taken, London, the proportion of women to men attending was not even two to one, and this disproportion was mainly confined to the Anglican and Roman Churches. In any case, the disproportion is notoriously due to the greater disinclination of women (generally) to enter into serious study of political, economic, religious, or any other issues. One might as well say that their emotions cling to anarchy because they generally take so little interest in politics.

That the emotions are not peculiarly on the side of religion is easily seen by a study of the religion of poets, the great spokesmen of emotion. The outstanding poets of Europe have voiced the rebellion against religion at least as conspicuously as the philosophers have done. One traces the revolt of the heart right along the line from Dante onward. Dante's "Hell," barbaric as it is in so far as it embodies the horrible belief of his time, is nevertheless extremely heterodox. He places "sinners" in the pit, not as a theologian would, but on an almost purely pagan or humanitarian classification of virtues and vices. So Philip Wicksteed and other of our Dante scholars have pointed out. Sexual sinners get off comparatively lightly; it is the *social* delinquents who suffer most heavily. And the second part of Dante's great poem, the "Purgatory," is a flat defiance of the religious belief and theological teaching of the time.

Shakespeare's religion has been discussed with such contradictory results that we may very well

presume that he gave expression to no religious feeling at all. Every lover of his plays and poems must feel that it is *man* that inspires him. Gods and devils and sprites count for little. In his later plays, especially, the humanitarian sentiment glows, and the religious element recedes. It is a general feature of the poets and dramatists of the brilliant Elizabethan age; a feature common to the whole of that artistic Renaissance in Europe of which it is a part.

Milton falls in a period of religious reaction, yet his great poem is a revolt against the theology of the Puritans. He rationalises, more or less humanises, the story of the devil. His Satan is not the weird, incomprehensible thirster for human souls of the average "round-head." No great poet ever embodied the religious belief of his time in an ethic without rationalising it to some extent.

When we reach the beginning of the modern period, the first violent onset of the storm, the poets go beyond other writers. Goethe and Schiller in Germany—Blake, Byron, and Shelley in England, represent poetry at that time. How much religion do we find in those princely orators of human emotion? Shelley's "Prometheus Unbound" is a clarion call to all the anti-religious forces of the time. Blake is a bitterly anti-clerical. Byron is very human. Goethe and Schiller lashed the clergy into fury.

The poets of the nineteenth century vary with the various periods of progress and reaction, but very few, even of our English poets, were orthodox Christians. Wordsworth was a gentle Pantheist.

Tennyson, though he died a nominal Churchman, was hazy and hesitating about fundamental doctrines. Browning was a Deist. Swinburne was a pure humanitarian and a fierce opponent of religion. Of modern English poets the majority are either indifferent or hostile to religion. Read William Watson's "Unknown God." The great Italian poet, Gabriele d'Annunzio, is as anti-religious as Swinburne or Nietzsche, and few French poets have any feeling for religion. Poetry, like philosophy, has been secularised. The heart of man is as human as his head.

It is the same with all other branches of art. I have elsewhere (*The Bible in Europe*, Ch. VIII.) examined the belief that the splendid art of the Middle Ages was due to religious inspiration. It is a portentous fallacy. The earlier art, the noble cathedrals with their beautiful windows, are due to unknown men whose feelings we cannot discuss. If we judge them by the great artists of the later Middle Ages, whose lives and sentiments are well known, we may presume that religion was their *employer* but not their inspiration. Such purely religious art as that of Fra Angelico is comparatively rare.

As wealth passes in the Middle Ages from the clergy to bankers and civic corporations, painting becomes more and more secular, yet rises to greater heights. The great Italian artists of the Renaissance, like the sculptors of ancient Athens, took their subjects from religion (since the Church was still the wealthiest employer) and their models from the ranks of the courtesans. The great painters of

the Roman school, in particular, breathed an atmosphere that was almost void of religion and saturated with license. Pinturicchio painted the Pope's notorious mistress on the walls of the Vatican Palace *as the Virgin*. The exquisite portrait is there to-day, and, if we were not aware of the irony of the model, we should probably hear much about its "religious inspiration." Rubens seems in his great religious pictures to have drawn deeply upon the inspiration of piety; but we find him an equally great artist when, in his "Venus and Adonis," he paints the nude portrait of his buxom mistress.

Music, conceived as a dialect of the "language of the heart," bears the same complexion. If any man were tempted to dwell unduly upon the fact that painting and sculpture decayed when the old Church was shattered—the fact is that Italian art decayed in proportion as the Church was reformed, while the secular art of the Netherlands flourished—we might point to the history of music. It seems only to have found its height after the secularisation of art. Catholic composers naturally produce mass-music, or other church-music, at times, but this is inevitable as long as the Churches and the religious public remain wealthy employers. Most certainly there is in modern music no bias toward religious themes.

It would, in fact, be safe to say that the artistic world generally is, and has long been, less respectfully disposed toward religion than the scientific world. We must make allowance for the commercial element. As long as there remains a large religious public, with wealthy organisations, there

will be a production of religious art. We shall have painters producing mystic visions of Christ—to be multiplied in hundreds of thousands of prints for the purchase of simple folk. We shall have sacred music, and “Lost Chords,” and “Signs of the Cross,” and so on. But these things are but a fraction of the total production of modern art, and in many cases the commercial aim is obvious. Our artist-world is anything but religious, yet it has immeasurably more right to interpret “the voice of the heart” than a body of prosy ministers or a body of women with uneducated emotions.

In fine, let us notice another crude and mischievous fallacy which is encouraged in this connection. In speaking, as they so often do, of “soulless materialism” and “cold reason” and the “cold light of science” the clergy and religious writers give their clients the impression that all the “warmth” of life, all the fine emotion of life, is associated with religion and will decay with religion. This is a monstrous perversion of the facts.

It is, in the first place, a monstrous perversion of the facts to represent that the scientific attitude, especially when it is associated with Rationalism, discourages sentiment and tends to beget a character devoid of geniality and tenderness. A scientific genius may, of course, become so absorbed in the fascination of his high intellectual tasks as to starve, more or less, the emotional side of his nature. That may happen to any type of severe worker, not only in law, commerce, or politics, but even in the ecclesiastical world. Church-history is full of examples of saints who thus

extinguished in themselves every human tendency to geniality and tenderness and mirth.

But these are exceptional types, and even the lives of these greater and more absorbed Rationalists are often gravely misrepresented. The life of Professor Huxley, written by his son, is a picture of glowing and genial human nature of the most attractive character. Tyndall (more "materialistic" than Huxley) was an extremely emotional man, as the fine poetic passages in his works show. Darwin was a man of the utmost delicacy and modesty; a more human man than four out of five of the prelates who speak darkly of the consequences of irreligion. Haeckel is not only a man of generous emotions, strong artistic feeling, and high idealism, but—I speak from personal knowledge—a man of the most charming ways in the small details of intercourse with his fellows. L. Büchner, the so-called materialist, was of the same character. A man like J. S. Mill may seem to those who read the story of his boyhood to belong to the earlier type I have described, yet Mill was a man of warm and delicate emotions, and of a quite fiery human idealism, as every woman ought to know. Mr. G. K. Chesterton (*The Victorian Age in Literature*) says that he preached "a hard rationalism in religion, a hard competition in economics, and a hard egoism in ethics." One wonders how a man who was so "fresh and delicate and pure" and had such a "silvery sensitiveness" of soul (as Mr. Chesterton describes Mill) could cling obstinately to so "hard" a gospel. I am not sure what the sensitiveness of silver is, or what is the difference between "hard" and "soft"



rationalism. But I do know that Mill's teaching about religion (in his *Three Essays on Religion*, which Mr. Chesterton does not seem to have read) is a kind of emotional theism mingled with a fervent admiration of Christ, and that, as regards "hard egoism in ethics," it should be well known to every Catholic, at least from the works of Dr. St. George Mivart, that Mill declared he would burn in hell for all eternity, if there were a hell, rather than lie (profess a false doctrine) at the bidding of the Almighty.

The position is, in fact, invested by religious writers with the usual interested obscurity. There is no "voice of the heart"; alternatively, as the lawyers say, if there is, it is not at all on the side of religion. Rationalism is no more opposed to the cultivation of fine sentiment and genial humanity than is religion itself. Indeed, Rationalism might fairly claim that all efflorescences of great art have found their true inspiration in nature and man, and have, for the greater part, had only an accidental connection with religion. The attempt to set up within man himself a rebel to the teaching of modern culture entirely fails. Properly trained emotions follow the guidance of reason. We have seen that in each of the preceding sections "the heart" follows the head in resenting either the continued perversity of the clergy or the medieval crudeness of some of their doctrines. It remains to see how, in regard to matters which concern the mass of men and women more closely than do these questions of science and history and philosophy, the human verdict on Christianity confirms the verdict of the thinkers.

## CHAPTER II

### THE VOICE OF REVOLUTION

ON an earlier page I have referred to the theory known as Pragmatism: a philosophical fashion of the hour, in very restricted circles, which seems to encourage people to test beliefs by their profit rather than by their truth. To this I do not so much object that truth is too sacred a thing to be thus thrust into a subordinate position as that beliefs cannot in the long run have any value at all unless you are sure that they are true. In point of fact, however, the Pragmatists, while complaining of the academic pedantry of other thinkers, are themselves too academic. It is precisely the complaint of the clergy that men find their human interests opposed or restricted by religion, and are always falling away from it without logical justification.

The clergy explain that they mean the "improper" interests of men: the lusts of the flesh, the excessive love of pleasure, and all that they sum up under the horrid word "materialism." I have already shown that materialism, which is a theory of the universe—the theory that only matter exists, which scarcely any positively assert—has nothing whatever to do with these things. The few scholars who have been called materialists—Bastian, Büchner, and Haeckel, for instance—

were men who, on the moral side, taught a high idealism and were disposed to be too ascetic.

I have already said, also, and have proved in detail elsewhere, that vice and crime have actually diminished in civilisation as the influence of religion has decayed. The fact is that men have discovered, on the one hand, that conduct need have no relation whatever to religious motives, and, on the other, that certain very proper and material interests of theirs have been grossly neglected, or even still more grossly frustrated, by the representatives of religion. This, especially, is the verdict of humanity which I propose to discuss in the present section; it is the ground of the very considerable hostility to religion among the masses of men who know little or nothing about the verdict of science, history, or philosophy.

Here again, as in the last chapter, one is amazed by the audacity with which religious writers pervert the truth. They claim, in varying degrees, that Christianity is actually responsible for the civilisation of Europe, and that therefore we enter upon a most dangerous experiment, to say the least, when we seek to do without it. In the historical section I have refuted the greater part of this claim. The truth is that Christianity came into a world, the Roman Empire, which already had a high social and moral code, and was patiently attacking the deep-rooted abuses (such as slavery) which still lingered in it from barbaric days. It is further undeniable that when Rome fell its civilisation fell. Its great school-system and its Stoic social idealism, in particular, were swept

away. All the advantages won by the experience of thousands of years of civilisation were lost. Europe entered the morass of the Middle Ages.

Almost the only thing that can be said for the Middle Ages from the present point of view is that the workers had their trade-corporations or Guilds. Catholic writers who would hold up these Guilds as a model for the modern workers are strangely indifferent to the change of circumstances. We no longer have an England of five million people scattered, in villages or very small towns, over fifty thousand square miles, with very imperfect and scanty means of communication. England has no longer a few tens of thousands of craftsmen, in little groups isolated by leagues of country that must be traversed on foot. The miniature institutions of a few centuries ago cannot without absurdity be proposed as models to-day.

But the religious claim which accompanies or inspires this proposal is still more absurd. The free workers of the Roman Empire had trade-organisations (*collegia*) just as elaborate and advantageous as those of the Middle Ages; indeed, they were closer to the powerful trade-unions of modern times. The shores of the Mediterranean witnessed a remarkable and international development of this ancient trade-unionism. Christians did not enter into and support these combinations of the workers, partly because they were largely of a religious (pagan) character, and after the fourth century they fell to pieces. The overwhelming mass of the workers of Europe then became either slaves or (which was hardly better)

serfs, brutally exploited by the new lords of the soil. Not for many centuries did a single Christian writer protest against slavery or demand the emancipation of the downtrodden serfs. During those long and bitter centuries the Church moved not a finger on behalf of the workers. Isolated abbots, often themselves sons of the people, might at times plead for them, but the Church had no message.

The change came, not from the influence of the Church, but from the course of political economic development. Church was pitted against State, king fought baron; and each contending party would win the serfs by emancipating them. Commerce and industry advanced. Free towns multiplied. Skilled craftsmen grew in numbers in the growing towns, and, as in the older Roman towns, they formed corporations for their own advantage. These things, like art, took on a religious complexion merely because in those days everybody was religious—under pain of death here and damnation afterwards. It is historical nonsense to claim that the Church inspired these Guilds in the interest of the workers. And apart from this one survival, or restoration, of a Roman institution, social service did not exist. The abundant schools, the municipal hospitals, the fine system of law, had disappeared as completely as the old Roman roads. Europe was so densely illiterate that it did not suspect that it had once been civilised.

The growth of industry and commerce from the twelfth century onward, the intercourse with the highly civilised Arabs and Spanish Moors, and the

Renaissance of letters in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, inevitably led to a great improvement, in spite of the incessant drain of warfare, pestilence, famine, and religious fanaticism. But it would be impossible here even to summarise the development. It will be enough to recall the social condition in which the majority of the men and women of Europe found themselves when, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, they attained some degree of self-consciousness.

The question will naturally occur to the reader how it was that Europe, after its long slumber of illiteracy, awoke to this first phase of self-consciousness. The awakening began, as is well known, at a different date in different countries. Russia did not even emancipate its serfs until after the middle of the nineteenth century (1861). England, partly owing to its earlier breach with the medieval Church, had made most progress. Other countries were awakened by the explosion of the French Revolution. Indeed, since even the workers of England remained somnolent and docile, or were content with futile local outbursts against the new industrialism, until the lesson of the French Revolution was impressed upon them, that Revolution stands broadly for the inauguration of the modern period.

Now it is undeniable that the awakening of the French was due mainly to anti-clericals, and was resisted by the clerical allies of the monarchy. Voltaire sought to impress upon the French middle class the superiority of the democratic English institutions. Rousseau went to the very roots of

the social order and inspired the watchword of the Revolution : " Liberty, Equality, Fraternity." Other middle-class heretics pressed home the lessons of the American rebellion. No mere revolt of the peasantry would ever have brought about the French Revolution. It was the middle class, educated for the most part in the principles of the large body of free-thinking writers, who initiated and accomplished this historic revolt against the injustices of the old order.

It is hardly necessary either to explain what those injustices were, or to show that the Church, which had complacently regarded them for ages, had nothing to do with their overthrow. The very fury of the later stage of the Revolution sufficiently illustrates both points. That bloody violence was never contemplated by, and was vitally opposed to all the principles of, the middle-class freethinkers who had won liberty and justice for the people. It was the people themselves, still overwhelmingly Catholic in belief and densely ignorant, who, finding themselves masters, vented in appalling massacres the rage which centuries of intolerable oppression had engendered. Let this be clearly understood. The sound work of the early phase of the Revolution, the work which has permanently changed the face of Europe for the better, was mainly due to anti-clerical writers and statesmen. The later excesses, the work which provoked in Europe a bloody and pernicious reaction, were due to the people whom the Church had moulded and who were still largely Catholic.

And the direction of this fury of the people

against the clergy shows plainly enough on which side the clergy had been. They had for hundreds of years been on the side of the oppressors, and had to no small extent shared in the exploitation of the ignorant and miserable peasants. The village church was, as a rule, spared, while the château was burned. The people were Catholic. But the priest was guillotined or driven into exile as a traitor to Christian principles as well as to France. The presence among the Revolutionaries of an occasional priest, like the Abbé Grégoire, must not be permitted to distract our attention from the general attitude of the Church. It was on the side of reaction, not progress; of oppression, not justice.

This explosion of popular fury, this thunderous voice of humanity, in France awoke echoes all over Europe: in Belgium, Holland, Germany, Austria, Italy, Spain, Portugal, and even Russia. Everywhere was raised the cry of "the rights of man"; and nearly everywhere, after the downfall of Napoleon, that cry was smothered in blood. In Spain, Portugal, and Italy the persecution of those who demanded liberty and democracy was medieval in its brutality. In other countries it was less sanguinary, but it was in many respects little less revolting and selfish.

Now it is a fact on the very surface of history, and deep down into the roots of the history of the time, that this persecution had the full approval and assistance of the clergy. In Spain and Portugal, where the brutality was greatest, the clergy and the monks were most conspicuous and



prominent in supporting the tyrants. In Italy and Austria the part of the clergy was equally notorious. The Popes, who still had secular power over a large part of Italy, were not one whit better than the other monarchs. Large numbers of Italians were put to death or exiled because they claimed what are now recognised to be elementary rights of citizenship. In France, England, and Germany there was the same brutal denial of those elementary rights, and the few clergymen who in France sided with the oppressed were driven out of the Church. Neither Papacy nor Protestant bishops had a word to say on behalf of those who claimed justice. Both approved the policy of suppression and persecution. In England, in those days, hardly a single individual clergyman helped the fight for justice, and the whole bench of bishops opposed it.

As the century wore on, and there was an increasing prospect of the triumph of democracy, a few clergymen, like Lamennais in France or Kingsley in England, espoused the cause of the people. But this was done quite obviously in the interest of religion, which the workers were beginning to disdain. In the earlier and more trying part of the struggle hardly a clerical voice was heard on the side of the right; and, when we remember that thousands of the clergy (especially among the Nonconformists and Catholics) were themselves children of the workers, this negligence gives terrible force to the indictment of the Churches. The clergy shrank behind the pretext that the question of social justice, which was

raised, was "politics"—as Popes still do when it is convenient. Almost the only clergyman who spoke forcibly on the side of the workers during that bitter early struggle was Joseph Rayner Stephens; and Stephens was persecuted by his Church and imprisoned by the State.

The tradition of anti-clericalism amongst the masses in Europe, the verdict of humanity (apart from culture) on the Churches, is so much bound up with this early page of our modern social history that it is advisable to be more precise. In our busy age there is little study of history, beyond the occasional reading of the life of some frivolous duchess or gay monarch. Working men have, as a rule, little conception of the appalling conditions in which their grandfathers lived, and very few religious people have any idea of the moral and social state of England a century ago. Hence the clergy, often quite innocently, find large and patient audiences when they preach or write upon the *social* importance of religion in general and Christianity in particular. Whatever scholars may make of our doctrines, they say, we are socially indispensable. In the face of quite recent historical facts the claim is monstrous.

The more prudent or better educated of the clergy, who know that England was a century ago in a foul condition, rely rather on the fallacy, or trick of rhetoric, to which I have referred: the familiar fallacy of taking a part for the whole. Religion not an inspiration of social service! they exclaim. What of Bishop Wilberforce and his Christian colleagues in the fight for the abolition

of slavery? What of Lord Shaftesbury and his Christian colleagues in the fight for the bettering of the condition of child-workers? What of Elizabeth Fry and the heroic struggle for prison-reform? What of Dr. Bell and the movement for educating the children of the workers?

Well, let us see what we can make of them. In the first place we notice that the list of early social workers (before Kingsley and the Christian Socialists) includes only two clergymen out of fifty thousand, one Churchman out of many millions, and a Quaker. With each, of course, was a small group of colleagues. The Churches and the overwhelming majority of their clergy and laity were indifferent or hostile. We are really not greatly impressed with the social inspiration of religion when we learn that a few religious people here and there objected to the appalling social disorders of their time.

Then let us examine these spurts of idealism. In regard to black slavery, the stigma of its deliberate establishment by Christians long after slavery had been abolished, and the terrible cruelties inflicted upon the American slaves, are so outrageous that the wonder is, not that we find a bishop protesting, but that we find all the other bishops and clergy supinely indifferent to it, or in support of it, for two hundred years. We may add that the long agitation which was needed before it was abolished was overwhelmingly conducted by laymen; that these laymen were Deists or Quakers in a proportion far beyond the size of their respective bodies; and that in America, where the great

evil was found, the Churches owned slaves and played a scandalous part.

In regard to the education of the workers the credit of Dr. Bell and his Church of England associates is to be still more heavily discounted. At the beginning of the nineteenth century the workers were totally illiterate—the nation was illiterate to the extent of 95 per cent.—and this profound ignorance was notoriously connected with the general coarseness and brutality of life. The idealism of the early French Revolutionists had by this time inspired a good deal of liberal feeling amongst educated Englishmen, and a demand for schools arose. A modest Bill passed the House of Commons in 1807, but was contemptuously rejected by the Lords, the Archbishop of Canterbury leading the opposition with great vehemence. In the meantime the Quaker Joseph Lancaster had established a system of schools, and the Rationalist Robert Owen had set a magnificent example in educating the children of his employees. It was solely as a reaction against these “heretical” efforts, solely to maintain the influence of the Church, that the Rev. Dr. Bell and his Church of England associates began to turn barns into schools and secure that the children of the workers should not be taught “beyond their station in life,” as they expressly said. Compared with the splendid school set up by Robert Owen the educative work of the Church was mean, paltry, and selfish. Yet for fifty years the Church resisted every effort to induce the State to do the work more efficiently.

It remains that a few devout Churchmen like Lord Shaftesbury and Quakers like Elizabeth Fry applied themselves earnestly to the betterment of the condition of children or of prisoners. I am not in the least disposed to belittle what these isolated Christian men and women did, or to question that their religion greatly influenced their fine characters. It is, however, quite obvious that to quote these instances is no reply whatever to the general charge against Christianity. It would be, not ordinary moral futility, but quite a miracle of moral futility, if no Christian out of all the millions in England had been moved to attack these social injustices. In the early part of the nineteenth century the condition of child-workers was revolting. In the mills they worked, often for a penny a day, ten or twelve hours a day, from the age of seven upward, in the vilest conditions; and the brutal treatment of chimney-sweepers and other child-workers was known to all England. What astonishes the social historian is that *so few* protested, and particularly that the bishops and clergy had not a word to say. Similarly with the prisoners. The jails were, physically and morally, too repugnant for words; the homes and quarters of the criminals were hotbeds of crime; the sentences upon them were brutal and stupid. It is really naive to point out to us that, after these things had been tolerated for centuries, one or two Christians suddenly discovered that they were wrong.

Further, we naturally ask how it was that, while generation after generation had tolerated

these things, it was discovered in the nineteenth century that they were wrong. Christianity was not founded in the nineteenth century; it was then eighteen centuries old, and its principles had been exhaustively discussed for more than a thousand years. The Golden Rule had not been buried, like Greek wisdom, and re-discovered. The Sermon on the Mount had never ceased to command admiration. How was it that, after thousands of learned divines and millions of preachers had failed to see the social justice implied in Christ's principles, it was left to a few laymen of the nineteenth century to make the discovery?

It is very difficult to discuss this subject without irony. As I write there comes to me a cutting from an important daily which reviews simultaneously a work of mine and one by Father Bernard Vaughan. My work demands that religious ideas be put on one side, and social idealism be based upon humanitarian sentiment: Father Vaughan's work eloquently pleads that humanitarian sentiment is barren without religion, and that all social idealism springs from religion. Father Vaughan is, of course, totally ignorant of social history (and most other matters), but his argument is very popular in the Churches. Yet a study of the social and moral development of England in the nineteenth century shows that all this is empty rhetoric. In point of historical fact Christianity has not inspired social idealism at all.

It is, in other words, perfectly obvious that some other leaven was introduced into the mind of

Christian England when its men and women began at length to undertake reform. The reform did not start with the clergy, who, as I said, remained indifferent to, and largely hostile to, social reform until it became apparent that men and women were going to carry out the reform without their aid. As to the laity, it would be quite absurd to say that Shaftesbury and Elizabeth Fry were more Christian than the myriads of scholars and good people who had gone before them. They were not more Christian, but more human. The earnest young man of to-day who says that they were more Christian precisely because they were social idealists merely means that they were more like himself. Christ, we saw, had not the least idea of social idealism, because he believed that the end of the world was near. No early Christian—and we are told that Christianity was purer in its early days—had any social enthusiasm. He left that sort of thing to the pagans (Stoics). No Christian for eight hundred years perceived that Christ “implicitly” condemned slavery, as the good young man of the modern Y.M.C.A. is taught to believe.

No, Christianity did not inspire social idealism. It was social idealism that breathed a little life into the dry bones of Christian ethics. To any person who thinks otherwise the answer is peremptory. Let him try to find a record of social idealism before the French Revolution. He will find that a few schools were built—while 95 per cent. of the population of Europe were left illiterate. He will find that a few hospitals were erected—

while Europe at large was a running sore of disease and pestilence. He will find a saint or two who befriended criminals—while the criminal courts and jails and homes of Europe were directly productive of crime. He will find a good deal of almsgiving—while the workers were, all over Europe, brutalised by wretched pay, long hours, terrible conditions, vile homes, and political tyranny. He will find some beautiful rhetoric about virtue—while drunkenness, gambling, sexual licence, violence, and crime were rampant to a degree unknown in our time. He will, in a word, find that, fourteen centuries after the establishment of Christianity in Europe, the social system everywhere was totally diseased, and the clergy everywhere were totally indifferent to it.

On an earlier page I quoted the Bishop of London lamenting that London to-day is "less godly" than it was a century ago. It is; and if the bishop had a spare hour in which to study the London of a century ago he would discover that its godliness was allied with a comprehensive corruption which might surprise him. Prostitutes were then, in proportion to population, and according to the statements of the police (given by a writer of the time, the magistrate Colquhoun), *twenty times* as numerous as they are to-day, and general looseness of conduct was much greater than now. Gambling was permitted on the streets and encouraged by the State-lotteries. Drunkenness was immeasurably worse than it now is. Pleasure was brutal and revolting. Wives were sold in public. Children were worked or beaten



to death. Crime was so flagrant that one hardly ventured out after dark. Industrial oppression was absolutely unchecked. The political system was infamous. And the Bishop of London of that day and his colleagues did not know what social idealism meant.

This was the legacy which the modern world in all countries received from "the ages of faith." Then a new thing entered the life of Europe: humanitarianism. Modern social idealism is the child of it and of the scientific spirit. The Revolution had from its Sinai thundered a new commandment: the rights of man. Reaction, stoutly aided by the bishops, blotted out the commandment. It remains to see how it ultimately triumphed.

## CHAPTER III

### THE TRIUMPH OF HUMANITARIANISM

IN the third decade of the nineteenth century it must have seemed that the French Revolution had been abortive, and that the new gospel of the rights of man was entirely blotted out. The restored monarchs of Europe savagely repressed every attempt to put forward again even the moderate claims of the early Revolutionaries. The peasantry and artisans fell back into sullen subjection. The social order was gross and pitiable. The restored clergy co-operated everywhere with the forces of reaction.

Lest the reader have a suspicion, which is encouraged by clerical writers, that the issue was purely political—the strictly political question of democracy or aristocracy—let me summarily state the social condition of England, of which, in the previous chapter, I have given little glimpses. The political issue was but a symbol of a larger issue. As is well known, a few wealthy land-owners practically elected and controlled the House of Commons in their own selfish interest, by corrupt means. The fight for a larger franchise and purer political life was really a fight for the power to abolish injustice and reform the country. For the life of England was still largely medieval and brutal. As I said, crime, bloodshed, sexual licence, drunkenness,

and gambling were immeasurably greater than they are to-day. Sport was brutal and degrading. Ignorance was dense and general. Woman was an outlaw, and no law protected the child from brutality and exploitation. Criminal procedure was insensate. The workers were appallingly exploited and coerced, and they had no right of combination to better their condition. The squalor, degradation, and misery of life were still such that the population, in spite of a full birth-rate, increased only fifty per cent. between 1701 and 1801, whereas between 1801 and 1901 it has, in spite of a restricted birth-rate, been nearly quadrupled.

This social condition may be verified, and studied in all its terrible details, in any standard work (like Traill's *Social England*). The reader who is disposed to listen to rhetoric, like that of Father Vaughan or the Bishop of London, about the social service of Christianity, ought to inquire whether this is a true picture. It is, in point of fact, a very inadequate statement, as I approach the necessary limits of my work. But it is enough to show that at that time, fourteen centuries after the establishment of Christianity, social service did not exist. We have since those days changed the face of England, however imperfect the reform may yet be, and we have to ask whether this social service of the nineteenth century was due to the Churches.

The crying needs were the education and juster treatment of the workers, and in order to secure these it was absolutely necessary to reform Parliament and extend the franchise. The immediate need and the immediate cry was, therefore, for a

political reform which would place a share of power in the hands of better men. The great agitation for reform, which was crowned (because of its threat of civil war) in 1832, began. The share of the clergy in this is notorious. They resisted the reform so vigorously and unanimously that even cathedrals were violated by the angry crowds. It will be pleaded that the Church of England was then wholly Conservative, and that reform was allied with Radicalism. Very good : I am merely pointing out the fact that Churchmen *did* resist reform with all their power, and must not now talk about "social service." The Nonconformists and Catholics made no greater display of social service.

But we must look a little closer into this "Radicalism" which was allied with reform. In reality it was a social rather than a political cleavage. The Radicals were the men who wanted a comprehensive reform of English life, and knew that it could only be brought about by State-action. The Churches knew well that they were resisting reform in resisting what they called Radicalism.

I imagine a Catholic smiling at the charge that his co-religionists of that date did not work for reform. The height of folly or prejudice, Father Vaughan would say, to indict a small and unjustly treated group because they did not exert a national influence ! Let him study the contemporary record of his Church in France, Italy, Spain, and Portugal, where it was then all-powerful. It is a record, deeply stained with blood, of fierce co-operation with tyrants against reform. But there is another aspect of the matter. Gasquet, in his history of

Catholicism in England, says that there were 146,000 Catholics in London alone in the year 1829—the period of which I am speaking. That is more than there are in London to-day. Even if the figure is exaggerated (as it is), there must have been some hundreds of thousands of Catholics in the country. They had considerable collective wealth, and they were “emancipated” in that very year. But their record in the history of reform is a blank.

Now Rationalism was not in those days an organised force. It was represented by an unknown number of seepies, of various shades, who were in most places socially ostracised and were at times heavily punished for expressing their opinions; while the Catholics had complete liberty to express theirs. Yet the record of Rationalism in this heroic struggle for reform is magnificent.

A dignitary of the established Church, Canon Lewis, wrote a few years ago a work (*Modern Rationalism, as seen at work in its biographies*) which was published by the Christian Evidence Society. The author thinks that an account of the lives of leading Rationalists will be very “damaging” to Rationalism. He says: “The Christian religion could have made nobler men and women of them, had it been allowed to have the making of them.” He roams over half of Europe, and a period of a century and a half, to find heretics in whom he may detect some irregularity or eccentricity. Instead of taking the well-known and properly so-called English Rationalists of the last half century (of whom only three or four are mentioned), he talks much about Voltaire and Paine

(Deists), thinks the career of J. S. Mill ("the saint of Rationalism," Gladstone said) or H. Spencer "damaging," says that Huxley abandoned Agnosticism, and so on. A very paltry and contemptible book. Let us look at the actual record.

If Voltaire was a Rationalist, so were Rousseau and all the other French writers who inspired the early social idealism of the French Revolution, which begat social idealism in England. They began the story of modern social service and reform. Paine translated it into English, and largely inspired the demand for reform in this country. Mary Wollstonecraft raised the banner of women's rights, and Frances Wright, another "infidel," passed it on. But the great Rationalist of the period I am describing, the man who explicitly called himself a Rationalist and abandoned the last trace of religious inspiration, was Robert Owen. Canon Lewis does not talk about Robert Owen, or his famous Rational Religion (without a God) and its hundred thousand members, or his magnificent social record, or his "missionaries" who, like G. J. Holyoake, showed Rationalism in action. Yet Owen was one of the greatest social forces in Britain in the early part of the nineteenth century. No other single man had so great a share in the work of reform or was so comprehensively bent upon reform. The Owenite movement, which was purely Rationalistic, was one of the most socially beneficent in the whole first half of the nineteenth century; while the clergy slept. Owen attacked war, demanded the education of the workers, pleaded for an eight hours' day and the right of

combination, urged reform of the jails and the drink-traffic, and espoused the cause of woman. There was not an evil of his time that he did not assail, and he had a mighty influence and a character that kings respected.

The more scholarly Rationalists of the time were Jeremy Bentham and James Mill, in whose footsteps walked John Stuart Mill. What Mr. Chesterton calls their "hard egoism in ethics" is well known to most other people as Utilitarianism; and it is equally well known that this did not mean that an individual was to look after his own profit, either on earth or in heaven, but that he was to promote "the greatest happiness of the greatest number." That was the contribution of Rationalism to the inspiration of England in those strenuous early decades of the nineteenth century. Every society founded by Owen, and later by Holyoake, was impregnated with that principle. It is to-day the distinctive ethic of Rationalism.

Thus, while religion officially opposed reform, Rationalism was pledged by its own moral principles to support it. The contrast was so flagrant that in the mass of millions of men who now fought for reform, and held gigantic meetings in all the large cities, there set in that anti-clerical strain which two generations of clerics have not succeeded in expelling from the democracy of this country. When the masses triumphed, and the Reform Bill was carried, men looked with disdain upon the part that the clergy had played.

But the work of reform only commenced with the purification of Parliament. Then began in

earnest the fight for education, for the right of combination, for the liberation of woman, for the decent housing of the workers and decent conditions of industry, for criminal reform, for liberty of speech, for the suppression of the worst kind of child-labour. These things were won by an army of reformers which embraced men of every creed and none. They had but one common bond: humane sentiment. Robert Owen walked by the side of Elizabeth Fry, while the priests and the levites scoffed, because both were humanitarians. Chartists and Owenites fought shoulder to shoulder, because both demanded the rights of man. W. J. Fox, G. J. Holyoake, J. S. Mill, C. Southwell, W. J. Linton, W. Watson, R. Buchanan, G. J. Harney, A. Trevelyan, Harriet Martineau, H. Hetherington—all the well-known Rationalists of the time worked in some, or every, branch of the reform-movement. But I will not attempt to draw up a complete list of names. The views about religion of a large number of the prominent workers of the time are hazy to this hour. Further large numbers were Deists, Unitarians, or Quakers. Orthodox Churchmen and Nonconformists were, comparatively to the size of their organisations, rare among the leaders. Catholicism might not have existed in England at all.

Looking back upon this strenuous and stirring time—say, from 1820 to 1850—one is amazed at the impertinence or the ignorance of men who claim that Christianity inspired the social reform which changed the face of England. The very fact that in the later forties F. D. Maurice and



Charles Kingsley set up a "Christian Socialism" is a sufficient indication that the broad reform-movement was taking men away from religion. Maurice himself ascribed his aim as "to Christianise Socialism," and, as is known, he was ejected from his chair at King's College for his opinions. The Churches were officially hostile, and the fundamental reform, the need of a State system of education, was persistently frustrated by the Church of England for more than half a century. Throughout the whole period the bishops in the House of Lords used their power on the side of reaction.

Yet that there were large numbers of members of the various Churches in the reform-movement is quite clear, since the small minority which was then definitely non-religious could not have carried any reform. The truth is that a humanitarian passion had seized England, and large numbers of Christians could not but see, in spite of the silence or hostility of their clerical leaders, that the moral principles of their creed countenanced rather than prohibited the work of reform. Those moral principles were, however, merely the common maxims or social laws of justice and practical brotherhood which at all times impress themselves upon the human mind. Neither were they a peculiar possession of the Christian creed, nor did they in the familiar Christian form inspire social service. It was sentiment rather than moral principle that animated the great creative period with which I am dealing. It was human sympathy with the suffering and human disgust at the social

maladies which civilisation still endured. It was something common to Christian and non-Christian. It was that humanitarianism which animated Shelley as well as Wilberforce, Owen as well as Shaftesbury, Holyoake as well as Kingsley. To attribute it to the Christian ethic is, in view of the record of the Churches in those heroic years, an historical absurdity.

The reader will perceive that something very different from a narrow partisanship moves me to make this analysis of the spirit which reformed England in the earlier half of the nineteenth century. We have not merely to recall the historical facts in order to show the falsity of the claim, which is now heard on every side, that Christianity is the inspirer of our civilisation. We have to form in our own minds a deliberate and judicious opinion upon the practical issue which is forced upon us; whether we may, without social danger, or with actual social profit, discard Christianity from our lives. That issue must be settled, not by the rhetoric which religious writers and preachers put before us, but by the facts of our social history.

It is a grave reflection upon the slovenly ways of thinking that have been encouraged amongst us that no one has yet written a precise record of our social experience with special reference to the inspiration of its progressive principle. Rhetoric and counter-rhetoric are all that one finds. I urge the reader to follow the course which alone will give him a just opinion. Take any work which—like (to quote a handy and readable volume) the Rev. Ramsden Balmforth's *Some Social and*

*Political Pioneers of the Nineteenth Century*—covers the period of struggle, and try to get at its inspiration, especially the inspiration of its leaders. You will find three great and luminous facts standing out in any such history of the period. The first is that the Churches were so aloof from, in part so hostile to, the reform-movement that scarcely a single clergyman is identified with it until, about the middle of the century, the growing irreligion of the masses moves Maurice and Kingsley to found their short-lived Christian Socialism. The second is that Rationalism was splendidly represented in the reform-movement from the start, and every one of Owen's Rational Religion Societies and Holyoake's Secular Societies was an ardent centre of social inspiration. The third is that the great movement which carried the reforms consisted of men, and was fired by leaders, of such diverse creeds and views that their common human sentiment is the only conceivable bond of union.

Once more, therefore, we have a verdict given against the Churches and the clergy. Not only did they fail during centuries of power to inspire social service and reform, but when the ideal was definitely brought forward by others they were either indifferent or hostile. Their claim of social usefulness is as false as their claim to a possession of revealed truth. It is a peculiarly modern spirit, which they endeavoured to strangle at its birth, which has reformed the world. It is humanitarianism which has partially cleansed our civilisation of the disorders *they* so long tolerated in it,

and to humanitarianism we turn for the inspiration to complete the work.

An advantage which the clergy of our time have is that so few persons read history. The flowing periods in which the preacher describes the conversion of a vicious pagan world into a garden of Christian virtue cannot be checked by his hearers and recognised as a monstrous perversion of the facts. In like manner, the claim that religion alone inspires social philanthropies and moral advances is too rarely tested by the historical facts. The members of the Churches to-day find in them some zeal for social betterment, and are easily persuaded that this is a long-standing and natural outcome of their creed. American missionary troupes now include a "social expert," as well as the indispensable clerical singer. Politicians and social writers are invited to speak at the P.S.A. Many clergymen, even of the Church of England, are Socialists. Religious congresses discuss social questions.

All this is a recent growth. The work of reform had been substantially done before social zeal began to sprout in the sanctuary and the Sunday-school. The Churches could not afford to remain longer in their spiritual isolation. The laity discovered that they had bodies as well as souls, and the discovery was so absorbing that they began to neglect church-going. Above all, some social students looked up the part which the Churches had played in the heroic age of reform and found it lamentable. A new note was struck at ecclesiastical congresses. The men who on Sundays assured their people that religion alone

inspired social zeal said to each other in their congresses that it was really time to get up some social zeal. The churches were half empty. Lecture halls were filled. The curate was becoming a stock figure on the humorous stage. The rector found little respect among the artisans. So the new social fervour was advertised to the world. It is a death-bed repentance.

It is curious to observe the progress of this new social idealism within the Churches. It touched and won the laity, as we saw, long before it dawned upon the clergy; the more leisured exponents of Christian principles. That is in itself significant enough. It was not a matter of creed at all. Further, it penetrated the Churches in exact proportion to their simplicity of dogma. The Quakers were the first Christians to feel it. The Unitarians come close to these in the credit of their record during the first half of the nineteenth century, the real period of service. The Nonconformist sects were the next to awaken. The Church of England—apart from the Christian Socialist strain—lingered far behind, and even to-day its clergy and bishops, as a body, listen nervously to the discussion of social questions which it has been found expedient to include in the proceedings of the annual Congress. The Catholics bring up the rear; what they call social service is a barren discussion of Papal and medieval platitudes (gorgeously entitled “first principles” or “eternal principles”) which would not have hurt the feelings of Louis XIV.

I have dwelt at length upon the course of

reform in England, but it is necessary to add that the record in other countries is not a whit more flattering to Christianity, especially to Papal Christianity. I have in the previous chapter referred several times to the character of the period in Portugal, Spain, and Italy. It was a half century of the savage persecution of reformers by the joint forces of Royalty and Church. In Spain and Portugal alone there were in that half century immeasurably more men done to death because they fought for humanity than had been executed in the entire Roman Empire during three centuries of "persecution"; while the sufferings, short of death, of hundreds of thousands of men, women, and children make up a horrible story. The one extenuating circumstance that may be urged in defence of the Church's share in these massacres is that the rebels were as drastically opposed to it as to the royal tyranny. That is quite true; and it is proof enough that Rationalism stood on the side of humanity and social service, while the clergy ranged themselves, truculently, on the side of medieval brutality.

The "Liberals," as the progressives were called, were, in fact, the direct successors of the men who had taken their social inspiration, not from the Christian creed, but from the anti-Christian writers of eighteenth-century France. That early record is much studied in modern Spain and Portugal. Hence it is that the people of Portugal contemptuously dismissed their Church the moment they won liberty, and Spain itself seethes with anti-clericalism. Yet so gross is the tradition of the

holy alliance of Church and State in Spain that, in face of this revolt of millions against the Church, in the full light of the twentieth century, they were bold enough to murder a social reformer like Ferrer.

In Italy two supremely Catholic powers opposed reform : Austria in the north, the Papacy in the south. There, too, humanity had its martyrs, less than a hundred years ago, and the reformers were, like Mazzini, hounded over Europe. The social condition of the Papal States was pronounced by British diplomatists a scandal to Europe—even the Europe of fifty years ago—yet Pope Pius IX clung to his tawdry power, and defied the claims of humanity, until the sceptre was torn from his hands. And because the Vatican to-day, to save the remnants of its shrinking allegiance, encourages social work, we are asked to regard it as the historic inspirer of modern humanitarianism ! Italy knows it. Fully half the men of the country—more than half of the educated men—disdainfully ignore the Papacy.

In France the record of the Catholic Church is little better. The humanitarian gospel of the eighteenth century had there taken such deep root that the authorities dared not embark upon the sanguinary policy pursued by Church and State in the other Latin countries. There was, however, drastic and cruel coercion. As elsewhere, the Church stood with the oppressor, and the reform-movement was full of anti-clericals. As in England, the progress of the democracy inspired at length a “Christian Democratic” movement,

which aimed to save the Church; and, as in England, it experienced the frowns and censures of the clerical authorities—until democracy triumphed. The French have no illusions about the social value of Father Vaughan's Church. They have broken its power for ever, and only about four millions of them out of thirty-nine millions now cling to it.

In Protestant lands the story ran much as it did in England. In Germany, especially, the reformers were heavily persecuted, and the clergy took the side of the oppressor. Indeed, the political complexion of nearly the whole continent to-day, which often puzzles the Englishman, is an eloquent monument of those heroic days. "Liberalism" nearly everywhere means anti-clericalism. Over and over again it has been named bitterly in ecclesiastical censures. Yet social and political reform in the early nineteenth century was entirely bound up with what is on the continent called Liberalism. In the later part of the century Socialism appeared. Whatever one may think of its economic theory, Socialism stands for the ideal of social progress and justice; and between Socialism and the Catholic Church there is profound antagonism. The timid concessions of Leo XIII, which were too vague to have the least practical use, were lost in the crass Conservatism of his successor, and Socialism continued to gain heavily from the Church.

In short, the conscientious man will, in testing the claim that Christianity inspires social service, divide the history of Europe into three parts. The



first is the period from the establishment of Christianity (about 390) to the eve of the French Revolution; that long period of enormous clerical power is not devoid of "acts of mercy," but the foul condition of every country at its close is a sufficient reply to the claim of the clergy. The next period, passing over the failure of the Revolution, is the first half of the nineteenth century, when, in the face of brutal opposition, the task of reform was heroically inaugurated; in that period the Churches were overwhelmingly against reform. The third is the recent period, in which any organisation that would retain the affection of the masses *must* profess social idealism; and no serious man will be misled by such a belated and interested profession.

The Churches have been haled before the bar of modern social idealism, and the verdict of humanity which has been passed upon them is as crushing as the verdict of culture upon their dogmas. They flourished for ages in a world that was densely ignorant and cruelly oppressed. They neither conducted nor inspired the work of reform. When the work began, they frowned upon it or frustrated it. The millions of the cities of Europe to-day pass by their open doors. It was some other inspiration that cleansed the face of Europe. It was the work of neither God nor Christ nor priest, but of man.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE GOSPEL OF MAN

To summarise the indictment which I have concluded in the last chapter is impossible. This work is itself but a summary, an incomplete statement of the charges one could bring against religion. In other works I have given the full evidence with which those charges are supported. The accidents of life led me, first, as an ecclesiastical professor, to acquire a thorough command of theology, church-history, and religious philosophy, and then to spend twenty years in the study of science and history. It has therefore been my good fortune to have leisure to study minutely every aspect of the religious controversy, and in a series of works I have presented the evidence for the conclusions I have here summarised. To those works, or the works of other writers, I must refer the reader who would inquire further.

The temper of my works has been commended by the press generally, apart from Catholic journals, which consistently misrepresent them, as moderate and judicial. It may seem that in parts of this work I have passed from that attitude, and an occasional reader may wonder if there be not some truth in the suggestion that men may at times cherish a morbid and mysterious "hatred" of religion. It will be found, on reflection, that there

is no phrase in the book to support such a suggestion.

It is true that one cannot discuss certain aspects of the religious controversy without a tinge of resentment. Even the "cold Rationalist" and "hard egoist" ought not to cause surprise if, in contemplating the sustained imposition upon children and the uneducated of what even learned divines regard as fables, he betrays a shade of indignation. He cannot examine with a pretence of respect doctrines which have been so plainly discredited by modern culture, yet still form the official teaching of Churches which nominally comprise some 400 million members of civilised communities. Nor can he notice without some disdain the trickery with which the threadbare texture of these doctrines is hidden, the grave untruthfulness of a religious literature which professes to be the sole source of honour, the intrigues by which priests maintain their waning power, the complaisance of so large a proportion of our scholars, the hypocrisy of not a small proportion of our people.

But the most generous sentiment which inspires the warmth of some of the passages of this work is a deep regret that mankind should be diverted by the mirage of religion from its appointed task of reconstructing the earth. One feels neither hatred nor bitterness, but such anger as Christ is said to have felt when he drove the money-changers from the temple. Away with the last traces of this vanishing dream of heaven, which has too long drawn men's eyes away from earth! Pour into the service

of man this mighty stream of energy and devotion which during thousands of years has sunk into the barren tracts of religion ! Shake aside the last illusions of the childhood of the race and, proud in your grown strength and wisdom, form and carry out your own ideals ! Linger no longer in the " reconstruction " of fables which once beguiled the Arabs of the desert and the Syrian slaves of Corinth, but set your hearts and minds to the making of a new earth ! Sweep these ancient legends out of your schools and colleges, your army and navy, your code of law, your legislative houses, and substitute for them a spirit of progress, efficiency, boldness, and candour !

That is the attitude, the inspiration, of the Rationalist ; and the last fallacy I need expose here is the suggestion, sometimes made to me personally by quite friendly and courteous clergymen, that what generosity of sentiment there is in this attitude has itself been inspired by religion.

Nearly half a century ago, when a score of great Rationalists won respect for their principles by their fine personalities and high idealism, a sagacious writer, who may be described as neutral in the religious controversy, put forward this suggestion. Mill and Spencer, Huxley and Clifford, Holyoake and Bradlaugh, were, he said, burning in their lamps the oil they had brought over from the Christian temples. It would soon be exhausted, and the idealism of Rationalists would flicker and die. But the flame burns steadily to-day. It burned in the anti-Christian social writers of France a century and a half ago. It burned in Shelley and

Owen and Bentham, in Swinburne and Clifford and Holyoake—in Agnostics, Rationalists, Secularists, Positivists, and “Liberals.” It burns to-day in Watson and D’Annunzio and Galdòs and Anatole France, in Rationalists and Positivists and Ethicists and what Professor Smith calls “atheistic Socialists.” It is the ethic of Rationalism, which Hutcheson formulated nearly two hundred years ago: “That action is best which procures the greatest happiness of the greatest number.”

The great majority of, if not all, religious writers are unaware that the work of constructing a morality apart from Christianity began more than two centuries ago, when the first severe attacks were directed against Christianity. The question at once arose whether moral idealism was merely part of Christianity and must be discarded with it. The inquiry led men to discover the human significance of morality, which the teaching of the Churches had obscured. “Good and evil,” said Locke in 1689, “are nothing but that which occasions or procures pleasure or pain to us.” But a bishop, Bishop Cumberland, had already (in his *Laws of Nature*, published in 1672) discovered that the true principle of morality was social as well as utilitarian. “The happiness of each individual,” he wrote, “is derived from the best state of the whole system, as the nourishment of each member of an animal depends upon the nourishment of the whole mass of blood diffused through the whole” (p. 21).

This theory of morals a long line of English thinkers, some of them liberal clergies, have refined

and elaborated. It is an entire mistake to think it an innovation of J. S. Mill and Spencer, or even J. Mill and Bentham. It was settled long before the nineteenth century, and it was the basic principle of the anti-Christian social writers of the eighteenth century and the Rationalist workers of the nineteenth.

To those clerical writers who profess to doubt its efficacy we might recommend the study of history, either in the ancient Stoic or the modern period, but a simpler reply will suffice. It is in substance identical with, though superior in form to, that well-known moral principle: "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." Is this an arbitrary command, to be carried out only because Christ enjoined it, or is it a sensible and practical rule of conduct? Is it a piece of "hard egoism," of mean calculation? Has it been inefficacious? It is so obviously the real principle of moral or social conduct that the Chinese philosopher Kung-fu-tse also gave it as a summary of the ethical code. It is so much sounder than any other theory of morals that even Dante, in the heart of the Middle Ages, classified the sinners in hell on the social scale.

In the plainer language of our day it means that, since men live in social groups, the conduct of each is apt to affect others, and must therefore submit to certain restrictions. You might blot out of the world to-morrow all the legends about Mount Sinai and the Sermon on the Mount, all philosophies about eternal principles and laws of nature and categorical imperatives; and men would begin

again at once, in virtue of a painful experience, to reconstruct the moral law. It is equally foolish to suppose that moral law needs either a God or a genius to discover it, and to suppose that men may discard it. A dreamy philosopher like Nietzsche, who was almost blind to social considerations, may vaguely talk of a race of men who are superior to common morality; but the remainder of the community would not tolerate such moral anarchy, nor would, after a few years, a colony of Supermen. Moral law is social law. When that fact is generally apprehended, and the moral education of the race is traced on those lines, instead of laying upon children arbitrary commands from a disputed authority, we shall have greater social health.

I do not mean either that the complete adoption of such a moral education would at once curb unsocial impulses, and inaugurate a state of perfect conduct, or that the new moral code will entirely coincide with the old. It will take centuries of education to undo the mischief done by the transcendental and individualistic moral teaching of the Churches. It will take generations to implant firmly in the mind of the race a social sense that will rationally guide their conduct; and further generations to ensure the habitual response of conduct to ideal. After fifteen centuries of disordered life under the old ethic this is not long to wait. And we have, to encourage us, this remarkable social fact—this eloquent testimony to the value of the humanist principle—that, although priests still dominate education and prevent us from giving the young a sound training, although millions have fallen

away from the Churches yet passed under no other culture, the world has grown steadily better as it has discarded allegiance to Christianity.

On the second point, that the new morality may not necessarily coincide with the old, a vast amount of foolish alarm has been raised. On the one hand some modern writers have attacked all morality, when they meant that certain old moral restrictions would not survive; on the other hand, the clergy have cried that *no* morality would survive, when they meant that some line or lines of their code might be sacrificed. There is no need to shudder. The principles of justice, truthfulness, honour, and benevolence are so plainly connected with the well-being of our life that they will survive the death of all legends. Indeed, we may confidently trust that in proportion as their contribution to our happiness and well-being is made clear, and they are stripped of the mystic veils which priests and philosophers have put about them, they will evoke a nobler and more generous response in the heart of man. In that belief we are confirmed by our whole experience of moral progress in modern times. The demand for justice, honesty, and benevolence in our life has increased decade by decade, while religion has as steadily sunk.

If, beyond these great principles of morals, there are any precepts of the Christian code which have no social significance, they will not survive. The Protestant divine has discarded an important line of the Christian code of the Middle Ages: asceticism. He agrees neither with Christ, that he must "take up his cross," nor with Paul, that he must



“crucify the flesh.” Luther had the moral courage to eject from the moral code a superstition which wantonly poisoned the life of men. It may be that traces of it remain. But since the appeal to us of the clergy to-day is based entirely upon the cry that we shall suffer socially if we pass from them, we must assume that they are ready themselves to discard any moral tradition which imposes restraint on the individual without social reasons. And if there *are* social reasons—if it can be shown that the disputed ideal is really vital to our social welfare—it is safe.

And thus we solve a difficulty that has hampered the exertions of moralists in all time. The world has cowered under the moral ideal, as if it were a tyrant that jealously watched every sip we took of the cup of happiness. Like a dark shadow it has lain across the pleasant places of the earth, and those who were held to be its higher exponents—Plato, Christ, Marcus Aurelius—have used to us a language which soured our mirth, and made us rebellious or disdainful. Let us get rid of this superstition. There is no merit whatever in abstinence when indulgence would hurt no one. We want “the greatest happiness”—not a pale ascetic languor—“of the greatest number,” including ourselves. All joy is free, provided you hurt not your fellow, and blunt not those mental powers on which the progress of the world depends.

It may be felt that, while this doctrine may please the individual and reconcile him to such restrictions as the good of others demands, it may leave him selfish and fail to inspire a large constructive ideal-

ism. The lament comes with bad grace from those who for ages left men selfish, and even assailed constructive idealism when it first arose. But let us examine the issue candidly, in a grave spirit of social concern.

A distinguished philosopher, Plato, would have banished poets from his ideal commonwealth. I almost fail even to see the grounds of this misguided wish, but it would at least have been more intelligible if Plato had spoken of the prose-poets whom we call rhetoricians. Half the verbosity that passes as argument, especially in the pulpit and religious literature, is mere rhetoric. Now on a social issue rhetoric is particularly dangerous. It is essential that the judgment should consult facts, experience, history. And on the particular social issue which I am considering the facts of our recent history, which are easily ascertainable, afford clear guidance.

The broad and indisputable fact is that social idealism has very considerably increased, not decreased; that it was born in the anti-Christian literature of France on the eve of the Revolution, and has gained depth and power and range throughout all the subsequent decay of religion. It is as conspicuously associated with anti-clerical liberalism in the early part of the last century as it is with "atheistic Socialism" in the latter part. In order to understand the roots of this idealism one ought to study the minds of those early non-Christian idealists, not in the mean and malignant way done by Canon Lewis, but in a broad social spirit. And since I feel that the same spirit animates my

smaller efforts to-day—since there are no men with whom I feel a closer kinship than the noble Robert Owen and his high-minded disciple George Jacob Holyoake—I will attempt to analyse it as I experience it.

I do not love my neighbour as myself, nor have I ever heard that phrase used by any man on whose lips it was not merely a pretty and hollow formula. But I have wandered through the dark places of the earth, in many lands, and have felt that to join in the task of bringing into them light and health is a more pleasing, more satisfying, more thrilling experience than any other that life has offered. What have God and Christ to do with the matter? Here is a world blundering, bruising itself, wasting its superb resources, weakened and impoverished by strife and disunion; and beyond its dark horizon I seem to see a vision of a world to come—a world more uniformly sunny and joyous, a world united and skilfully organised, a world free from illusions and ascetic superstitions, a world proud of its developed strength and wisdom and creativeness. Here, in the great city in which I write, are acres of squalid habitations, with pale, dull-eyed folk condemned to have stunted minds and coarse tastes, the victims of every spiritual or industrial or political exploiter that comes along; and there, beyond, is the vision of an entirely possible transformation of these into Ruskin's "full-breathed, bright-eyed, and happy-hearted human creatures." Does one need a God to tell one to help in making the dream real? Does the Sermon on the Mount remotely contemplate, in

its narrow monastic asceticism, such work as this? Does one need the "inspiration" of religion to know that even a modest share in this glorious work is something beside which the petty titillations of the saloon-bar or the music-hall or the dance or the bridge-table are the amusements of children? The warm blood of life answers those questions. And precisely because I am convinced, and for twenty years have never wavered in that conviction, that these less fortunate folk will see no sun rise in a spirit-world when the mean earth has fallen upon them, and will receive no tawdry crown from the hand of a God, my blood stirs the more to help on the reconstruction of the earth, and to tell these heavy-laden men and women that the promise of a reward for poverty endured is a ghastly illusion and they would do well to claim their share of heaven now.

So Owen and his colleagues felt. And let there be no suspicion that this sentiment is possible only to those who strut the public stage of life and win a gratifying applause. Every man and woman may share it. Every person who becomes a unit in one or several of the idealist movements of our time, such as the movement for the abolition of war, is entitled to it. Every one who spares a tithe of his or her leisure to study the problems of life and be prepared when the hour of action comes is a builder of the future. Life is large enough for work and play and thought, and the growth of the social sense will dispose men to attend to all three.

In this is contained the answer to a question that is so frequently put: What would you substitute

for the Churches? Let us distinguish. The Churches have hitherto declared that they had two functions, teaching and ministry. In respect of the first function we want no successor to them. Never again will the public tolerate the dogmatism on the most profound questions of life and destiny of a body of men totally unfitted to enlarge upon such questions. We have science and history and, for those who care, philosophy. As teachers the clergy depart from us without honour or regret.

The ministry of the Churches is varied. In so far as they have professed to procure for us a magical quality which they call "grace," the sooner we are rid of such quackery the better. Man has remained feeble because he so long leaned upon those supernatural crutches. Further, as far as social idealism is concerned, we need not speak of substitutes for the Churches, for they have never inspired it. There is hardly a single large social question on which they agree even now. They do but wander round the streets of life imposing puritanical restrictions, which often err by excess and always leave the morbid impulse untouched, and call this "social service." They have neither scientific insight into the roots of what real disorder there is, nor courage to denounce much that they perceive. For social idealism we will continue to trust the human sympathy which gave it birth and the new science which will give it shape.

But what of the training of character? This is the only point which any serious person can have in mind in asking what we would substitute for the Churches; and I have made it clear that I regard

the cultivation of a straight, honourable, courageous, just, kindly, truthful type of man and woman as one of the fundamental needs of the world.

But to what extent does any person suppose that the Churches are now doing this work? How many of your neighbours would admit that they fear they would not maintain a decent standard of conduct unless they listened to some stumbling curate or portly rector for half an hour a week? Is preaching a real moral education? Do the millions of men and women who have ceased to go to church deteriorate in character because they no longer hear the Rev. Mr. Suckling's exhortations to virtue? Is it not a fact that a large proportion of those who have ceased to go to church have abandoned the practice mainly because being preached to is tedious, childish, almost offensive? How many grown-up folk in our time are really influenced by some man telling them to be good? How is it that London to-day, when only one in six hears sermons and one in ten pays any serious attention to them, is so much better than it was when nearly all went to church?

I have heard many men and women profess anxiety about the future if the Churches disappear. But I never heard man or woman profess anxiety about *his* or *her* own future on that account; it is always the neighbour whose moral health gives them concern. There is no ground for concern. We have done amazingly well in the last fifty years with a decreasing amount of moral culture. Our schools give practically none; they give "Bible lessons." And after school-age young folk now-

adays avoid the preacher as much as possible. Yet we have a more decent generation than any Britain ever yet bore. Clerical talk about our vices and crimes is constructive untruth; the figures must be compared with those of earlier days, and it will be found that we are remarkably virtuous. When the nation uses its educational machinery, guided by a scientific study of the problem, in training character the rate of progress will increase.

Can we dispense with further direct culture after the school-days are over? Japan has done it for ages. The Japanese do not hear sermons, yet every writer on Japan pays high tribute to the average Japanese character. Comparatively few French people now hear sermons, yet France has made considerable moral and social progress of recent decades. The Chinese do not hear sermons, yet the average Chinese character is as good as ours. None of the old civilisations had sermons, but the average character was higher in Athens or in second-century Rome than it was in Christendom when everybody went to church. The sermon has not only *generally* failed in Europe as an instrument of moral culture, but it is itself losing that character. The preacher now usually assails the sins of the people who are not present. He has to be tactful.

But enough of arguing. In effect we have closed half the churches of England, because half the adults of the nation no longer go to church. No deterioration has followed. Crime grows less. Sobriety has enormously increased. The standard of public life has risen. Puritans who would have been received with scorn and laughter a century

ago now have great power. We have improved our clergy instead of their having improved us. Perhaps we shall improve still further when we close the other half of the churches. At the best the clergy are flies on the wheel. Something else has dragged the chariot ever onward, while the flies have decreased by one half. Brush the remainder of them away. Let the nation, as an organised body, grasp, cultivate, and direct that which we have found to be the real inspiration of Europe during the last century of progress. Let the nations, as separate and similar colonies on the vast human estate, concert a plan for the abandonment of the wasteful and horrible episode of war. Let us make a science of the life and resources of humanity on this planet; let us organise it as men organise a great business, so that the work of the world will alternate happily with the play of the world; let us act as if there were no heaven, and the one chance of happiness we have is before the heart ceases to beat; let us each be apostles of the social spirit until a sound standard of conduct rules the world. Then the altars and temples that have so poorly served our fathers may mingle with the ruins of the temples of Jupiter or Osiris, for man will have discovered the secret of life: that he who created God can create the Superman.





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